

*A Three Continents Book*

# Fate of a Cockroach and Other Plays

Tawfiq al-Hakim

translated from the Arabic  
by Denys Johnson-Davies

I wish us all success in our  
first Paper Exams 😁

WhatsApp: 08160932927

Compiled by

Michael Abur





# WhatsApp: 08160932927

## Introduction

Born in 1902 in Alexandria, Tewfik Al Hakim has occupied a central place in the Arab literary scene since he first made a name for himself in the late 'twenties. He is known primarily as a playwright, with an output of some seventy plays, and one of Cairo's theatres has been named after him. He has also produced several volumes of essays, a few short stories, and some enjoyable volumes of autobiography; at least two of his novels are landmarks in modern Arabic literature.

Tewfik Al Hakim became interested in the theatre at an early age. At that time, however, it offered neither a respectable nor a reliable means of livelihood and it is not surprising that his upper middle class parents showed no enthusiasm for his literary ambitions; in his autobiography he records how he did not allow his full name to appear on one of his early plays for fear that the news that he was the author might reach his parents. He was therefore persuaded to study law, which he did initially in Cairo. Having taken his degree, he was sent to Paris to complete his legal studies. He stayed in Paris from 1925 until 1928, where he spent the greater part of his time in the company of writers and many of his evenings at the theatre; he also read widely in French. On his return to Egypt he was appointed an attorney to the Public Prosecutor in the provinces and his experiences there provided the material for his novel *The Maze of Justice*.<sup>\*</sup> It was not long before he resigned from government service and devoted himself wholly to creative writing. Since then he has held a number of official appointments, including that of Director of the National Library in Cairo; he has also been his country's permanent representative with UNESCO in Paris.

<sup>\*</sup>The translation of this early novel was published under this title in 1947. The translation was made by Abba Eban and is now out of print. The only other book by Tewfik Al Hakim available in English translation is his play *The Tree Climber*, translated by Denys Johnson-Davies and published in 1966 by Oxford University Press, London.

## INTRODUCTION

vii

While living through disturbed times, Tewfik Al Hakim's own life has been comparatively free of dramatic incident; he himself is of a retiring and reticent nature and though his face is as familiar in the Arab countries as, say, Bernard Shaw's was in the English-speaking world, few people know anything of his private life – that, for instance, despite the playful misogyny expressed in many of his plays (as for instance in *Fate of a Cockroach*) he married in 1946 and has a son and a daughter. Tewfik Al Hakim has never been interested in political creeds and 'isms'. No Egyptian, however, particularly a writer, can stand wholly aloof from politics and it is amusing to note that Tewfik Al Hakim recounts in his autobiography how his first full-length play, written in 1919 and since lost, dealt with the British occupation of his country and was entitled *The Unwanted Guest*. It remained unpublished and unproduced. Over the years Tewfik Al Hakim has shown great skill – not shared by many of his fellow authors – in keeping out of political trouble. The inevitable accusation of living in an ivory tower (he published a volume of essays under the title *From the Ivory Tower*) has been levelled against him; while he has never entered any political arena, he has none the less throughout his career shown himself deeply concerned with such fundamental and potentially dangerous issues as justice and truth, good and evil and, above all, freedom.

All four plays in the present volume deal, directly or indirectly, with some aspect of freedom. In *The Sultan's Dilemma*, which takes place in the 'Thousand and One Nights' atmosphere of the rule of a Mameluke sultan, freedom and the choice faced by every absolute ruler are the themes. Those themes, incidentally, were as valid for the Egyptian reader in 1960, the year when the play was published, as for his forbears during the times of the Mamlukes. In *Fate of a Cockroach*, man's natural love of freedom, his refusal to despair in the face of adversity, are exemplified in the cockroach's strivings to climb out of the bath. *The Song of Death*, the earliest of the four plays and the most local, has as its central theme the conflict between traditional vengeance – as much a part of life in rural Egypt as in Sicily – and freedom through education from such deadening and destructive prejudice. *Not a Thing out of Place* seems to suggest that while the ultimate in freedom, anarchy, can be fun, true freedom consists in pursuing a middle way. Tewfik Al Hakim's preoccupation with freedom can also be seen from the title of one of his volumes of autobiography, *The Prison of Life*, in which he discusses the

Compiled by Michael Abur



individual's inability to escape from the imprisonment imposed upon him by the circumstances of his birth, by the fact that he is the child of two particular parents with particular attributes who in turn were brought into the world with inherited characteristics.

Tewfik Al Hakim is the undisputed pioneer of dramatic writing in Arabic. While Egypt has a theatrical tradition going back more than a hundred years, the plays produced were until recently either heavy melodrama adapted into cliché-ridden classical Arabic from the French or domestic farces, often with political overtones, written in the colloquial language. With his natural talent, his wide reading in French, his close study of the techniques of the European theatre (the dramatic form was unknown in classical Arabic literature), his interest in the problems of language – most pertinent in a culture where the written language differs so much from the spoken – with these attributes Tewfik Al Hakim gave to the Egyptian theatre the foundations of respectability it needed. That the theatre in Egypt today is both a serious and popular form of entertainment and that it is attracting some of the best talents among the younger writers is due in large part to the writer of the plays in this present volume.

DENYS JOHNSON-DAVIES

## Fate of a Cockroach

---

### Characters

#### *Cockroaches*

KING

QUEEN

MINISTER

SAVANT

PRIEST

A SUBJECT COCKROACH

#### *Procession of Ants*

#### *Mortals*

SAMIA, a housewife

ADIL, her husband

COOK

DOCTOR

### Act One — The Cockroach as King

*The scene is a spacious courtyard — as viewed of course by the cockroaches. In actual fact the courtyard is nothing more than the bathroom floor in an ordinary flat. In the front part of this courtyard stands an immense wall, which is nothing but the outer wall of the bath. The time is night, though from the point of view of the cockroaches it is daytime — our bright daylight being so blinding to them that it causes them either to disappear or go to sleep. At the beginning of the play, night has not completely fallen, which is to say that the cockroaches' day is about to begin. The King is standing in sprightly fashion next to a hole in the wall, perhaps the doorway to his palace, and is calling to the Queen who is asleep inside the palace.*

KING: Come along — wake up! It's time for work.  
QUEEN (*from inside*): The darkness of evening has not yet appeared.  
KING: Any moment now it will.  
QUEEN: Has the blinding light of day completely disappeared?  
KING: Any moment now it will.  
QUEEN: Until it disappears completely and night has completely come, let me be and don't bother me.  
KING: What laziness! What laziness!  
QUEEN (*making her appearance*): I wasn't sleeping. You must remember that I have my toilet and make-up to do.  
KING: Make-up and toilet! If all wives were like you, then God help all husbands!  
QUEEN (*aroused to anger*): I'm a queen! Don't forget I'm the Queen!  
KING: And I'm the King!  
QUEEN: I'm exactly the same as you — there's no difference between us at all.  
KING: There is a difference.  
QUEEN: And what, prithee, might this difference be?  
KING: My whiskers.  
QUEEN: Just as you have whiskers, so have I.

### THE FATE OF A COCKROACH

3

KING: Yes, but my whiskers are longer than yours.  
QUEEN: That is a trifling difference.  
KING: So it seems to you.  
QUEEN: To you rather. It is your sickly imagination that always makes it appear to you that there is a difference between us.  
KING: The difference exists — it can be clearly seen by anyone with eyes to see. If you don't believe me, ask the Minister, the Priest, the Savant, and all those worthy gentlemen connected with the court . . .  
QUEEN (*sarcastically*): The court!  
KING: Please — no sarcasm! I have an ever-growing feeling that you're always trying to belittle my true worth.  
QUEEN: Your worth?  
KING: Yes, and my authority. You are always trying to diminish my authority.  
QUEEN (*even more sarcastically*): Your authority? Your authority over whom? Not over me at any rate — you are in no way better than me. You don't provide me with food or drink. Have you ever fed me? I feed myself, just as you feed yourself. Do you deny it?  
KING: In the whole cockroach kingdom there is no one who feeds another. Every cockroach strives for his own daily bread.  
QUEEN: Then I am free to do as I like?  
KING: And who ever said you weren't?  
QUEEN: Let me be then. It is I who will decide when I shall work and when be lazy, when to sleep and when to get up.  
KING: Of course you are free to do as you like but, in your capacity as Queen, you must set a good example.  
QUEEN: A good example to whom?  
KING: To the subjects, naturally.  
QUEEN: The subjects? And where might they be? In my whole life I've never seen anyone around you but those three: the Minister, the Priest, and the learned Savant.  
KING: They are enough, they are the elite, the cream . . .  
QUEEN: But if you are the King you should be surrounded by the people.  
KING: Have you forgotten the characteristics of our species? We are not like those small creatures called 'ants', who gather together in their thousands on the slightest pretext.  
QUEEN: Don't remind me of ants! A king like you claiming you have worth and authority and you don't know how to solve the ant problem!



KING: The ant problem! Ah . . . um . . .

QUEEN: Ah . . . um . . . is that all you can say?

KING: What reminded you of ants?

QUEEN: Their being a continual threat to us. A queen like me, in my position and with my beauty, elegance, and pomp, can't take a step without trembling for fear that I might slip and fall on my back – and woe to me should I fall on my back, for I would quickly become a prey to the armies of ants.

KING: Be careful, therefore, that you do not fall on your back!

QUEEN: Is that the only solution you have?

KING: Do you want, from one day to the next, a solution to a problem that is as old as time?

QUEEN: Then shut up and don't boast about the length of your whiskers!

KING: Please! Don't talk to the King in such a tone!

QUEEN: King! I would just like to ask *who* made you a king.

KING: I made myself a king.

QUEEN: And what devious means and measures brought you to the throne and placed you on the seat of kingship?

KING (*indignantly*): Means and measures? Pardon me for saying so, but you're stupid!

QUEEN: I confess I'm stupid about this . . .

KING: What means and what measures, Madam? The question's a lot simpler than that. One morning I woke up and looked at my face in the mirror – or rather in a pool of water near the drain. You yourself know this drain well – it's the one at which we first met. Do you remember?

QUEEN: Of course I remember, but what's the connection between the drain, your face, and the throne?

KING: Have a little patience and you'll find out. I told you that I looked at my face in the mirror – something that you naturally do every day, perhaps every hour, in order to assure yourself of the beauty of your face.

QUEEN: At present we're talking about *your* face. Speak and don't get away from the subject.

KING (*rather put out by now*): As I told you, I looked at my face in the mirror – this was of course by chance . . . that is to say by sheer accident . . . meaning that it was not intentional, I swear to you.

QUEEN: That's neither here nor there. You looked at your face in the drain – what did you discover?

KING: I discovered something that surprised me and aroused in me . . .

QUEEN: A feeling of dejection.

KING: Not at all – of admiration.

QUEEN: Admiration of what?

KING: Of the length of my whiskers. I was really delighted at the length of my whiskers. I immediately rose up and challenged all the cockroaches to compare their whiskers with mine, and that if it was apparent that mine were the longest then I should become king over them all.

QUEEN: And they accepted the challenge?

KING: No, they conceded it to me there and then, saying that they had no time for whisker-measuring.

QUEEN: And so you automatically became His Majesty!

KING: Just so.

QUEEN: And did they tell you what your privileges were to be?

KING: No.

QUEEN: And did they tell you what their duties towards you were?

KING: No. They merely said that as I was pleased with the title and rank, I could do as I pleased. So long as this cost them nothing and they were not required to feed me, then they had no objection to my calling myself what I liked. And so they left me, each going his own way in search of his daily bread.

QUEEN: Then how was it that I became Queen?

KING: By commonsense logic. As I was King and you were the female I loved and lived with, so you were of necessity Queen.

QUEEN: And your Minister? How did he become a minister?

KING: His talents nominated him for the office of Minister, just as mine did for the throne.

QUEEN: We know about your talents – the length of your whiskers. But what are your Minister's talents?

KING: His consummate concern with proposing disconcerting problems and producing unpleasant news.

QUEEN: And the Priest, what are his talents?

KING: The completely incomprehensible things he says.

QUEEN: And the learned Savant?

KING: The strange information he has about things that have no existence other than in his own head.

QUEEN: And what induced you to put up with these people?

KING: Necessity. I found no one but them wanting to be close to

me. They are in need of someone to whom they can pour out their absurdities, whereas I am in need of close companions who will call me 'Your Majesty'.

QUEEN: All of which was brought upon you by your long whiskers.

KING: And am I responsible? I was born with them like this.

QUEEN: Maybe there was someone with longer whiskers than you and yet he never thought of declaring himself a king.

KING: Very likely, yet it was I who thought . . .

QUEEN: A stupid idea in any case.

KING (*indignantly*): And who are you to say? You understand nothing!

QUEEN: I understand more than you.

KING: You're a garrulous and conceited cockroach!

QUEEN: And you're a . . .

KING: Hush! The Minister's coming.

QUEEN: Then have some self-respect in front of him and treat me with respect.

KING: To hear is to obey, Your Majesty.

QUEEN: That's better! Husbands like you are submissive only to a woman who maintains her rights.

*The Minister makes his appearance, waiting.*

MINISTER: My Lord King! Help, my Lord King!

KING: What is it?

MINISTER: A calamity! A great calamity, my Lord!

KING: Goodness gracious! (*aside*) I told you his hobby was to bring unpleasant news. (*loudly*) Yes? Tell us, delight our ears!

MINISTER: My son, Your Majesty - my one and only son.

KING: What's wrong with him?

MINISTER: He has been taken in the prime of youth - has died in the spring of life - he has been killed! Killed!

KING: Killed? How? Who killed him?

MINISTER: The ants.

KING: The ants again?

QUEEN: There, you see? The ants. The ants.

MINISTER: Yes, Your Majesty, the ants - none but the ants.

KING: Ah, those ants! Tell us what happened.

MINISTER: What always happens.

KING: Be more explicit.

MINISTER: My son was walking along the wall, just going for a

stroll for amusement's sake, like anyone else at his age - a perfectly innocent stroll of course, for you well know what a well-behaved person he is. He's exceedingly serious, with no inclinations towards flirtations or foolhardy ventures, all those kinds of nonsensical pastimes . . .

KING (*impatiently*): That's neither here nor there - what happened?

MINISTER: His foot slipped and he fell to the ground. Of course he fell on his back and was unable to turn on to his front and get to his feet. And then the ants spotted him. They brought along their troops and armies, surrounded him, smothered him, and carried him off to their towns and villages.

QUEEN: What a terrible thing! Truly a catastrophe!

MINISTER: A great catastrophe, Your Majesty - a national catastrophe!

KING: I share your feelings of sadness for the deceased. Don't, though, ask that I announce public mourning.

MINISTER: I have not asked for an announcement of mourning, Your Majesty.

KING: That's extremely intelligent of you.

MINISTER: I am merely announcing that it is a catastrophe for the whole of our species.

KING: The whole of our species? The death of your son?

MINISTER: I mean rather the ants' aggression against us all in this manner.

QUEEN (*to the Minister*): He understands what you mean perfectly well. He merely pretends not to. He turns the matter into a personal one so that he need not bother himself about the decisive solution which everyone awaits from him.

KING: What are you saying? Are you trying to accuse me of neglecting the duties of my position?

QUEEN: I am not accusing you, I am merely drawing your attention to the necessity for finding a solution to the problem of the ants.

KING: And is the problem of the ants a new one? Speak, Minister?

MINISTER: No, Your Majesty.

KING: Then you know that it is not new, that it is old as Time itself.

MINISTER: Certainly, Your Majesty.

KING: We grew up, our fathers, our grandfathers, and our grandfathers' grandfathers grew up, with the problem of the ants there.



MINISTER: Truly, Your Majesty.

KING: Seeing that you know all that, why do you today assign me the task of solving it? Why should it be my bad luck that I, out of all those fathers and grandfathers who came before me, should alone be asked to find the solution?

QUEEN: Because before you came along there had been no one who was so delighted with the length of his whiskers that he demanded to be made king!

KING: Shut up, you . . .

QUEEN: Mind what you say!

KING (*between his teeth*): Your . . . Your Majesty!

QUEEN: Yes, that's the polite way in which you should address me.

KING: And with all politeness I would like to ask you how you know that before me there was no cockroach who wanted to be king?

QUEEN: Because such ideas only occur to someone like you.

KING: Like me?

QUEEN: Yes, because you're my husband and I know you well.

KING: Kindly note that we are not alone now, also that I am now fulfilling my official functions.

QUEEN: Go ahead and fulfil your official functions!

KING: Speak, Minister.

MINISTER: Before you, Your Majesty, we lived in an age of primitive barbarism. We had neither a king nor a minister, then you came along, with your sense of organization and sound thinking, and ascended the throne.

KING: Then I have a sense of organization and sound thinking?

MINISTER: Without doubt, Your Majesty.

KING: Tell Her Majesty that!

QUEEN (*sarcastically*): Her Majesty is primarily concerned with the practical results. I want to see the fruit of this thinking and organization. Come on, produce a solution to the problem of the ants!

KING (*impatiently*): Come along, Minister – suggest something!

MINISTER: As you think best, Your Majesty.

KING: Yes, but it's up to you first to put forward an opinion, even if it's a stupid one. I'll then look into it.

MINISTER: Put forward an opinion?

KING: Yes, any opinion. Speak – quickly. It's one of the duties of your position to put forward an opinion – and for me to make fun of it.

QUEEN: Perhaps his opinion will be sound.

KING: I don't think so – I know his opinions.

QUEEN: Why, then, did you appoint him Minister?

KING: I didn't appoint him. I told you so a thousand times – I never appointed anyone. It's he who appointed himself. I accepted because he had no rival.

MINISTER: I volunteered to act without a salary.

KING: Talk seriously, Minister, and don't waste the State's time.

MINISTER: I've found it! Your Majesty, I think we could overcome the ants with the same weapon they use.

KING: And what's their weapon?

MINISTER: Armies. They attack us with huge armies. Now if we were able to mobilize ourselves and assemble in great numbers we'd find it easy to attack them, to scatter and to crush them under our great feet.

KING: A stupid idea.

QUEEN: Why do you make fun of it before you have discussed it?

KING: It's clearly unacceptable and absurd.

QUEEN: First of all, encourage him to speak and then talk things over with him.

KING (*turning to Minister; peevishly*): I have encouraged you and here I am talking things over with you. Speak. Tell me how many there will be in the army of cockroaches you want to mobilize?

MINISTER: Let's say twenty. Twenty cockroaches assembled together could trample underfoot and destroy a long column of ants – nay, a whole village, a whole township.

KING: Of that there is no doubt, but has it ever happened in the whole of our long history that twenty cockroaches have gathered together in one column?

MINISTER: It has not, but we can try . . .

KING: How can we try? We are quite different from ants. The ants know the discipline of forming themselves into columns, but we cockroaches don't know discipline.

MINISTER: Perhaps by learning and training . . .

KING: And who will teach and train us.

MINISTER: We can look around for someone who will undertake it.

KING: Marvellous! So we end up with looking around for a teacher and a trainer! Tell me, then, if we find the teacher and the trainer, after how many generations will the species of cockroaches be taught and trained to walk in columns?

MINISTER: Such information, Your Majesty, does not fall within

my province. I have merely given my opinion as to the plan of action. It is for others to talk about the details.

KING: Who are those others? For example?

MINISTER: Our learned Savant for example. He is the man to be asked about such information.

QUEEN: He is right. These are things about which the learned Savant can talk.

KING: And where is the learned Savant?

MINISTER: We'll ask him to come immediately, Your Majesty.

KING: Ask for him and let him come - we are waiting.

*Hardly has the Minister made a move than the learned Savant makes his appearance, panting.*

MINISTER (*to the Savant*): My dear chap, we were just about to inquire about you. His Majesty wants you on an important matter.

SAVANT: Good.

MINISTER: His Majesty will tell you . . .

KING: No, you tell him.

MINISTER: Shall I put the whole matter to him?

KING: Yes - quickly.

MINISTER: The matter in question is the problem of the ants.

SAVANT: What about the problem of the ants?

MINISTER: We want to find a decisive solution to it.

SAVANT: And what have I to do with this? This is a political problem. It is for you to solve - you in your capacity as Minister and His Majesty in his capacity as King.

MINISTER (*now baffled*): A political problem?

SAVANT: In any case, it's an old problem. It does not fall within the province of science or scientists.

KING: But the Minister has turned it into a scientific problem, because he wants the cockroaches to be taught to walk in columns.

SAVANT: That can never happen.

MINISTER: But it must do, because we can't go on like this for ever, having the ants attacking us and not being able to drive them off.

QUEEN: The Minister is right, we must think seriously about this danger.

SAVANT: What exactly is required of me?

QUEEN: To assist with your knowledge. All hope now lies with science.

SAVANT: Define exactly what is required. What is required of me precisely? In science things must be precisely defined.

QUEEN: Define things for him, Minister.

MINISTER: You know that the ants attack us with their armies. If we also were able to mobilize an army of twenty, or even ten, cockroaches with which to attack them, we would be able to destroy their towns and villages.

SAVANT: Then mobilize ten cockroaches!

MINISTER: And who will do so?

SAVANT: You and His Majesty the King - that's your job.

KING: Our job!

SAVANT: Naturally. If the King can't order ten cockroaches to assemble together, then what authority has the King got?

KING (*haughtily*): It seems that you're living in a daze, learned Savant!

MINISTER: The problem is how to gather these cockroaches together.

KING: Tell him! Tell him!

QUEEN: Inform us, Savant, has it ever hapened that you have seen ten cockroaches gathered together in one spot?

SAVANT: Yes, I once saw - a very long time ago, in the early days of my youth - several cockroaches gathered together at night in the kitchen round a piece of tomato.

QUEEN: Tomato?

SAVANT: Yes.

KING: An extraordinary idea - this matter of a tomato!

MINISTER: We begin from here.

QUEEN: And you say that science cannot solve the problem?

SAVANT: What has science to do with this? That was no more than a general observation.

KING: This is the modesty of a true Savant. The idea is, however, useful. If we were able to get a piece of tomato, then a number of cockroaches would gather together round it.

SAVANT: The real problem is how to get hold of a piece of tomato.

KING: How is it, therefore, that we do sometimes get hold of a piece?

SAVANT: By sheer chance.

QUEEN: And when does sheer chance occur?

SAVANT: That is something one cannot predict.



KING: You have therefore arrived at solving one problem by presenting us with another.

QUEEN: Suggest for us something other than tomatoes.

SAVANT: Any other sort of food puts us in the same position, for though we can find food we are unable to make a particular sort of food available.

QUEEN: Can't we get cockroaches together without food?

SAVANT: Neither cockroaches nor anything else.

MINISTER: That's true. The armies of the ant species themselves assemble only round food, to carry off food, or to store food.

KING: Our sole method of getting cockroaches together is food?

SAVANT: That's right - from the theoretical point of view.

QUEEN: What do you mean?

SAVANT: I mean, Your Majesty, from the practical point of view it's all neither here nor there, because the cockroaches assembling round the food won't make a bit of difference - they'll just eat and fill their stomachs, then each will take himself off.

KING: That's true. It has happened before. Remember how after I was installed as King a number of cockroaches happened to assemble round a piece of sugar we found - it was sheer good luck - and I seized the opportunity of this gathering to deliver the speech from the throne. I rose to my feet to speak, with them having eaten their fill, and hardly had I uttered two words than I found each one of them waving his whiskers and going off on his own. They left me shouting into thin air!

MINISTER: That's just our trouble!

QUEEN: Is there no cure for this, O Savant?

SAVANT: It is something ingrained.

QUEEN: There must be a reason.

SAVANT: I have thought about this a lot and have hit upon a reason. The fact is that a strong link has been observed between the assembling of cockroaches in one place and the occurrence of catastrophes of a certain sort.

MINISTER: You mean the moving mountains?

SAVANT: Exactly - and the annihilating, choking rain.

KING: That's true. I have heard news of just such calamities.

SAVANT: This has today become confirmed from a scientific point of view. If a number of cockroaches gather together in one place, and there is bright, dazzling light, mountains that have neither pinnacles nor peaks move and trample upon our

troop, utterly squashing them. At other times there teems down a choking rain that destroys every one of us.

QUEEN: And what is the reason for this, O Savant?

SAVANT: Natural phenomena.

KING: And why do these natural phenomena only occur when several cockroaches are assembled?

SAVANT: Science has not yet arrived at an explanation.

KING: And what is the true nature of these moving mountains and this annihilating, choking rain?

QUEEN: These moving mountains and this choking rain, are they intended to destroy us?

SAVANT: These are all questions which cannot be answered scientifically.

QUEEN: Then why do these catastrophes only occur when we are assembled together?

SAVANT: I do not know, Your Majesty. All that science can do is to record these phenomena, to link up the connection between them and deduce a scientific law.

KING: You mean to say therefore that our fear of such calamities has made our species from time immemorial afraid of assembling together?

SAVANT: Exactly, it is from here that this characteristic has arisen - the fact that each one of us goes off on his own in a different direction: an instinctive defence mechanism.

MINISTER: But the ants do exactly the opposite to us.

SAVANT: The ants, because of their tiny size, can do what they like, but we larger creatures are in a special position.

MINISTER: But by their coming together they overcome us.

SAVANT: Yes - regretfully.

MINISTER: And the solution? We want a solution, O Savant.

KING: The Minister's son was torn to pieces by troops of ants who carried him off to their villages.

SAVANT: My sincere condolences, Minister.

MINISTER: Thank you, but this is not all we expect of you.

KING: That's right - we want of you something more useful than merely condoling with the Minister.

QUEEN: We want a definite remedy.

SAVANT: Give me time in which to examine the matter. With me everything must be done on a proper basis, with one step following another. First we must start by knowing ourselves, by discovering what is round about us in this vast cosmos. Do you know for example what is to be found behind this shiny

wall underneath which we stand? (*He points at the outer wall of the bath.*)

KING: What is there behind it?

SAVANT: I have climbed to the top of it many times and have seen the strangest of things.

ALL: What did you see?

SAVANT: I saw a vast chasm – probably a large lake, though the strange thing is that it is sometimes without water, at others full of water.

ALL: And why is that?

SAVANT: I do not yet know, but after having observed this phenomenon, I was able to observe a constant factor, namely that this lake was full of water in the glare of light, but was empty of water in the darkness.

KING: And what is the relationship between light and the water?

SAVANT: There is some sort of relationship but I do not yet know the reason for it. Nevertheless we have been able to deduce a constant law in the form of a true scientific equation, namely that light equals water and darkness equals dryness.

KING: At such a moment, therefore . . .

SAVANT: At such a moment the lake is dry and it has a very beautiful appearance. Its sides are smooth and snow-white – as though strewn with jasmine flowers.

QUEEN: I wish I could see them.

SAVANT: With great pleasure. If Your Majesty would permit me, I shall lead you to the top of the wall, and then you can look down at the deep chasm – a marvellous sight.

KING: I too would like to see it.

SAVANT: I am at your disposal – let's all go.

MINISTER: Wait – the Priest is coming.

*The Priest makes his appearance.*

KING: Come and join us, O venerable Priest!

PRIEST: That's exactly what I'd like to do, for I have just passed by a most sad sight.

KING: A sad sight?

PRIEST: Yes, a procession of ants carrying a cockroach. The cockroach, it seems, was dead and motionless. An ant at the head was dragging him by his whiskers, while at the rear a group of them were pushing him. There was nothing I could do but to ask the gods to have mercy on him.

QUEEN: Do you not know who it was?

PRIEST: No.

QUEEN: That was the Minister's son.

PRIEST (*turning to the Minister*): Your son?

MINISTER (*lowering his head in sorrow*): Yes.

PRIEST: May the gods grant you comfort! I shall say a prayer for you.

MINISTER: Thank you!

KING: We were just now discussing what we should do about these catastrophes, for the time has come to search for a remedy. Have you any suggestion, O Priest?

PRIEST: I have only one suggestion.

KING: Don't you dare say to offer up sacrifices!

PRIEST: There is nothing else.

MINISTER: Do you see, Majesty? We have now entered into another difficulty – the search for sacrifices. We may find them and we may not. Also, who will go looking for them and bring them back? I personally am not prepared to do so – my psychological state does not permit me.

SAVANT: I certainly am not prepared to do so, because I naturally do not believe in such methods.

PRIEST: Apostasy is rife in this kingdom!

QUEEN: Do not say such a thing, O Priest! You know well that I am a firm believer.

KING: Yes, we are believers, but the question of these sacrifices has become tiresome – and a trifle old-fashioned. In the past we have offered some of the sacrifices you demanded but they gave no result.

PRIEST: The result is not in my hands – I offer the sacrifices and the gods are free to accept or refuse them.

SAVANT: Your gods always refuse the sacrifices – only the ants accept them.

MINISTER: Truly. We noticed that with the piece of sugar you demanded as a sacrifice – it was the ants who ate it.

KING: Listen, O Priest – ask the gods to help us without it costing us anything.

PRIEST: Do you want them to serve you for free?

MINISTER: And why not? Does not our King undertake his official duties for free?

QUEEN: And I myself – the Queen – no one has given me anything, not even my dear husband. I strive for my daily bread like him, without any difference at all.



SAVANT: Nor I of course – no one has laid down any salary or wage for me.

MINISTER: Nor I too. I am the Minister of the kingdom and all my official functions are performed for no wage.

KING: Then why do you demand wages for your gods?

PRIEST: I will not *demand* anything.

KING: On the contrary, you must demand of them that they help us, but on the condition that such help is free and for nothing – god-sent!

PRIEST: I can't put conditions on the gods.

SAVANT: Do they stipulate the fee to you, or do you volunteer it?

PRIEST: There is no stipulation or volunteering, but anyone who asks something of someone should aim to tempt him.

SAVANT: So it's a question of tempting . . .

PRIEST: Describe it how you will, but I cannot make a request of the gods while I am empty-handed.

SAVANT: And do you think the gods are concerned with what you have in your hands?

PRIEST: What kind of question is that?

SAVANT: Have the gods ever listened to you?

PRIEST: Naturally.

SAVANT: When was that?

PRIEST: Once, I was lying ill in a corner when I saw the armies of ants approaching. I was certain that I was done for. I called upon the gods with a prayer that came from the depths of my heart. Suddenly I saw that something looking like a large dark cloud full of water had descended from the skies and swooped down upon the armies of ants and swept them quite away, clearing them off the face of the earth.

QUEEN: How extraordinary!

SAVANT: The scientific composition of this cloud is well known: it consists of a network of many threads from a large piece of moistened sacking.

KING: Neither the cloud's origin nor yet its scientific composition is of interest. What is important is who sent it down and wiped away the ants with it.

PRIEST: Speak to him, O King, and ask him who sent it down from the sky and with it destroyed the armies of the ants. Who? Who?

SAVANT: This is not a question that science can answer.

However, I very much doubt the existence of any connection between this priest's prayer and the descent of this cloud.

PRIEST: How is it then that the cloud descended only after my prayer?

SAVANT: Pure coincidence.

PRIEST: What blasphemy! What apostasy!

QUEEN: I am against blasphemy and apostasy, and you, my husband who are King, must be like me in this.

KING: Of course I am like you in this. Listen, O reverend Priest, I believe, must believe, that your prayer was beneficial. In any event, seeing that your prayer was efficacious and successful the once, it will clearly be so again. I would therefore ask you to pray and pray long.

MINISTER: Particularly as cost-free prayer without sacrifice has been successful.

QUEEN: Because, as he said, it issued forth from the depths of his heart.

PRIEST (*irritably*): Yes, all right – I shall pray.

QUEEN (*shouting*): Look! Look!

*A procession of ants carrying a cockroach makes its appearance.*

THE ANTS (*chanting*):

*Here is your great feast.*

*We carry it together, together,*

*To our towns, our villages:*

*A great and splendid cockroach –*

*Provision for the winter long.*

*With it our storerooms we shall fill.*

*None of us will hunger know,*

*Because we all lend a hand,*

*We're members of a single body.*

*There is amongst us no one sad,*

*There is amongst us none who's lonesome,*

*There is amongst us none who says*

*'I am not concerned with others.'*

*The ants move towards the wall with their heavy load, while the cockroaches continue to watch them in glum silence and stupefaction.*

KING: It grieves us, O Minister, to see your son borne off in this manner.



**PRIEST:** May the gods have mercy upon him! May the gods have mercy upon him!

**KING:** It's certainly a most dignified funeral!

**SAVANT:** So it seems, although logic dictates that it should be otherwise, for in relation to the ants it means food, that is to say a universal blessing, and the carrying of blessings and food should be accompanied by manifestations of joy, acclamations and singing.

**KING:** But we hear nothing – groups walking in utter silence.

**SAVANT:** That is so. We hear no sound from them because they are such tiny creatures. Who knows, though – perhaps they are making thunderous sounds?

**KING:** Perhaps they have a language?

**SAVANT:** Perhaps they were singing?

**KING:** Naturally – for them – this was a most suitable occasion for joy and singing.

**QUEEN:** I implore you! I implore you! Do not stir up the grief of a sorrowing father with such talk! Let us either do something for him or keep quiet.

**KING:** Forgive me, Minister, this was merely general talk about the ants, but – as the Queen says – something must be done, and this has occupied us since our meeting up today.

**QUEEN:** This meeting which up till now has achieved nothing useful.

**KING:** My dear! My dear! Your Majesty! We are still at the stage of conferring and exchanging points of view.

**QUEEN:** What conferring and what points of view? There are the ants in front of you! They are carrying off the Minister's son to make a good, wholesome meal of him. Is it so difficult for you, being as you are four hulking males, to attack and crush them, and to rescue the Minister's son from their hands?

**KING:** Are we four? Where's the fourth?

**QUEEN:** You of course.

**KING:** Ah, quite right. But I . . . Leave me out of it. I am the King and the King rules and does not fight.

**PRIEST:** Leave me also out of it. I am the Priest and the Priest prays and does not fight.

**SAVANT:** And I too, naturally. You must leave me out of it, for I am the Savant and the Savant makes research but does not brawl.

**QUEEN:** Then I shall go – I, the Queen – yet I shall not say I

am the Queen, but merely a female. Stand, you males, and watch with folded arms while females go to war.

**KING:** And the Minister? Is he not a male like us? Why is he standing by silently when the matter concerns him?

**MINISTER:** I do not want to put you in such predicaments because of my son.

**QUEEN:** As we have said, the matter is no longer merely that of your son.

**MINISTER:** I am grateful, Your Majesty, but . . .

**QUEEN:** The question is too important to be purely a personal one – they all know that, these most excellent leaders of the Kingdom. However, they don't want to know so they pretend not to, because they are without resolution, without willpower.

**KING:** My dear Majesty . . .

**QUEEN:** Shut up, you effete weakling! Leave the matter in my hands!

**KING:** Do you want me to give up the throne in your favour?

**QUEEN:** No, my dear sir. This throne of yours does not interest me, does not tempt me. All I want is for you to let me act.

**KING:** Don't be so headstrong, my dear. You can do nothing.

You want to attack, to make war, and to fight like the ants, but this cannot happen.

**QUEEN:** And why not?

**KING:** Ask the eminent Savant – he has the answer.

**QUEEN:** Speak, O eminent Savant!

**KING:** Speak and tell her why the ants know methods of warfare and we don't. Tell her, explain to her!

**SAVANT:** First, the ants have a Minister of War.

**QUEEN:** A Minister of War?

**SAVANT:** Naturally. A minister who devotes all his attention to the business of organizing armies. Is it reasonable that all these vast troops should march with such discipline and order in serried ranks without somebody responsible behind them, somebody specialized in organizing them?

**QUEEN:** The question's a simple one – why don't we too have a specialized Minister of War?

**SAVANT:** That is a political matter, and I don't understand politics. Ask His Majesty about that.

**QUEEN:** Please be so good as to reply, Your Majesty!

**KING:** What's the question?

**QUEEN:** Why do you not appoint a specialized Minister of War?



**KING:** A specialized Minister of War? Is that in my hands? Where is he? Let me find him and I'll appoint him immediately. We had quite enough trouble finding one Minister, our friend here. He was good enough to accept being a general minister to look after everything without understanding anything.

**MINISTER:** If I do not enjoy your confidence, then I am ready to proffer my resignation.

**KING:** Your resignation? Do you hear? Now here's our one and only minister threatening to resign!

**QUEEN:** No, honourable Minister. You enjoy the confidence of everyone. Don't listen to what the King says - he sometimes lets his tongue run away with him.

**MINISTER:** My thanks to Your Majesty!

**KING:** Your most gracious Majesty!

**QUEEN:** Then, O venerable Savant, the whole difference is that the ants have a specialized Minister of War?

**SAVANT:** That is not all they have.

**QUEEN:** What do they have as well?

**SAVANT:** A brilliant Minister of Supply.

**QUEEN:** A Minister of Supply?

**SAVANT:** A brilliant one - the operation of storing food in warehouses on that enormous scale must have some remarkable economic planning behind it.

**KING:** We have no need for any supply or any Minister of Supply, because we don't have a food crisis and have no need to plan or store.

**SAVANT:** Certainly, our economy runs by sheer good luck - and we boast about it!

**QUEEN:** Boast about it?

**KING:** Certainly, my dear. Certainly we have many things to boast about which should not be sneezed at.

**SAVANT:** In confirmation of His Majesty's opinion I would say that we have a characteristic not found among the ants, namely birth control. The ants let their numbers increase so enormously that they are driven into a food and storage crisis, and the need for food leads to war.

**KING:** We are certainly in no need of food, of the storage of food, or of war.

**SAVANT:** And so we are superior creatures.

**KING:** Without doubt. We attack no living creature; we harm no

one. We do not know greed or the desire to acquire and store things away.

**QUEEN:** Are there no creatures superior to us?

**SAVANT:** No, we are the most superior creatures on the face of the earth.

**QUEEN:** That's right, and yet we suffer because of those other, inferior creatures.

**SAVANT:** Inferiority is always a cause of trouble, but we must be patient. We cannot bring those creatures who are lower than us up to the same standard of civilization as ourselves. To each his own nature, his own environment, and his own circumstances. The ant, for instance, is concerned solely with food. As for us, we are more concerned with knowledge.

**QUEEN:** Knowledge?

**SAVANT:** Certainly. These long whiskers we have we do not use only to touch food. Very often we touch with them things which are not eaten, merely in order to seek out their nature, to discover their reality. Do you not, Your Majesty, often do just that?

**QUEEN:** Certainly. Certainly. I am very interested in touching strange substances with my whiskers, not merely from my desire for food but from sheer curiosity.

**SAVANT:** Yes, from curiosity, a love of knowledge, a desire to know.

**KING:** And yet you say, my dear Queen, that we are weak-willed. We are the sturdiest of creatures on earth, is that not so, O venerable Savant?

**SAVANT:** Most certainly, Majesty.

**KING:** Are the ants stronger than us? Impossible! They do not know us; all they know is how to eat us. But they do not know who we are. Do the ants know us?

**SAVANT:** Of course not.

**KING:** Have they got the slightest idea of the true facts about us, about our nature? Do they realize that we are thinking creatures?

**SAVANT:** The only knowledge they have about us is that we are food for them.

**KING:** And so, in relation to ourselves, they are inferior creatures.

**QUEEN:** Which doesn't prevent them eating us. We must find some way of protecting ourselves from being harmed by them.

**KING:** The only way is for us not to fall on our backs.

QUEEN: This, then, in your view is the whole solution?

KING: In the view of us all.

QUEEN: We have in short ended up where we began, that is to say at nought, nought, nought! Our meeting, our discussions, our investigations have all led us to nought, nought, nought!

SAVANT: In research there is no such thing as nought. Every investigation is useful. When we touch things with our whiskers we derive profit even though we do not exactly understand the true nature of those things. Which reminds me, a few moments ago I was saying that I had just come from making a very important discovery but no one appeared ready to listen.

KING: Ah, yes, it seems to me that I did hear you say so. And what is the discovery? Speak - I am a ready listener.

SAVANT: This lake . . .

KING: What lake? Ah yes, of course - we were talking about a lake and you wanted to take the Queen and me there so that we might see it.

SAVANT: And we were in fact on the point of going except that the Priest came along.

KING: Yes, that is true. Let us go then. Come, let's go now. That is at least more worthwhile than talking about fairy tales and fanciful projects! After you, my dear Majesty!

QUEEN: I shall not go with you. I shall stay here and the Minister will stay with me. He is naturally in no psychological state for sight-seeing.

KING: As you both wish. And you, O illustrious Priest, will you come with us?

PRIEST: Such reconnoitings have nothing to do with me.

KING: Then let us away, O Savant!

*The King and the Savant go off. The Queen, the Minister and the Priest remain.*

QUEEN: I am very sad about your loss. However, I am also sad and distressed about the shameful attitude of my husband.

MINISTER: Do not blame your husband, Your Majesty. Your husband, the King, is capable of doing nothing.

QUEEN: He is at least capable of being serious and of making up his mind; of being up to the situation.

MINISTER: The situation is difficult.

QUEEN: Certainly, and it needs a strong character to face up to it, but I am sorry to say that my husband is of a weak character. Have you not remarked this?

MINISTER: We rely on you, Your Majesty.

QUEEN: Were it not that I am at his side, what would he do? Deep down inside he feels this. I am a stronger personality than he, but he's always trying to fool himself, to make himself out as superior.

MINISTER: We all have our particular natures and characteristics. He is nevertheless good-hearted.

QUEEN: I don't deny that. He is a truly good person but . . .

PRIEST: But going around with that atheist of a Savant and listening to his nonsense bodes no good.

MINISTER: He also listens a lot to you, O venerable Priest!

PRIEST: And likewise he listens to you, O high-minded Minister!

MINISTER: He listens to everyone and to everything. It is only fair of us to say that he is a man with an open mind.

QUEEN: You defend him despite everything because without him you'd be without a job.

MINISTER: I, Your Majesty?

QUEEN: Yes, you. You in particular. The Priest has things to occupy him, so does the Savant, but you the Minister would have no work to do without the King.

MINISTER: And you, Your Majesty? You are the Queen and the Queen . . .

QUEEN: Understood - she too hasn't got a job without the King! I know that.

MINISTER: Sorry, I . . .

QUEEN: Don't apologize! My position is like yours. I know that. The difference, however, is that I'm female and he's always wanting to remind me that he's male - and that he's got longer whiskers than me!

*A cockroach appears; he is singing.*

COCKROACH (singing): *O night, O lovely night  
During which our eyes we close  
On things both dear and dread.  
O night, O lovely night.  
With one eye we go to sleep,  
With the other we impatiently await  
The breaking of the lucent dawn.  
O night, O lovely night.*



QUEEN: Who's that singing?

MINISTER (*looking*): He is a subject cockroach.

QUEEN: One of our subjects? Singing while we're thinking, thinking from early morning about his problem! Bring him here.

MINISTER (*calling to him*): Hey you, come here!

COCKROACH (*approaching*): Yes.

MINISTER: Who are you?

COCKROACH: Someone who sings and strives after his daily bread.

MINISTER: You are singing when we are thinking for you?

COCKROACH: And who asked you to think for me? I think for myself.

MINISTER: I'm the Minister.

COCKROACH (*sarcastically*): It's an honour I'm sure.

MINISTER: We are thinking about an important problem that threatens your life – the problem of the ants. You've come along at the right time. We'd like you and others to co-operate with us. What do you think?

COCKROACH: I think you should let me be.

*He turns his back on him and departs singing:*

*O night, O lovely night  
During which our eyes we close.*

MINISTER (*to the Queen*): It's no good!

QUEEN: It really isn't!

*The Savant looks down from on top of the outer wall of the bath.*

SAVANT (*calling out from on top of the wall*): Help! Help!

QUEEN: What's happened?

SAVANT: The King.

QUEEN (*anxiously*): What's happened to the King?

SAVANT: His foot slipped – he fell into the lake!

QUEEN: Fallen into the lake? How terrible!

MINISTER: Is the King dead?

SAVANT: Not yet. The lake's dry, it's got no water in it. Its walls are slippery and he's at the foot of them trying to get out.

QUEEN: Then let's go and help him to get out. Help him! Save him! For Heaven's sake, save my husband!

SAVANT (*shouting*): Stay where you are! There is no way of saving him – you can't get down to him.

QUEEN: We must do something for him. Let's all go.

SAVANT: Do not move! The walls along the edge of the lake are slippery and your feet too may slip and you'll fall in.

QUEEN: My husband must be saved! Save my husband! I beseech you – save him!

MINISTER: Yes, the King must be saved!

SAVANT: No one can do so. He is in the very depths of the chasm. The walls are slippery. One's feet will slip on the smooth walls. Only he can save himself, only by his own efforts – or a miracle from the skies!

PRIEST: A miracle from the skies! Now *you* speak of a miracle from the skies!

MINISTER: This is your chance, O Priest!

QUEEN: Yes, I implore you, O Priest, to do something about my husband. I implore you!

PRIEST: Has not this Savant said that there is no one in the Heavens to hear us?

SAVANT: Don't seize the opportunity to be coy! Anyone who is able to do something now should do so.

QUEEN: Yes. Do something, O Priest – please!

MINISTER: It's your duty, O Priest – save the King!

PRIEST: There is nothing for me to do but pray.

MINISTER: Then we ask you to pray.

PRIEST: All of us must pray. Even this Savant must pray with us, but he will not accept to do so.

QUEEN: He will, he will accept for our sake, for the sake of my husband.

SAVANT: I shall accept to do so so that I may invalidate his argument. If there really is someone up there who hears our voices, understands our language, and pays attention to our entreaties, that's fine. If not, we have lost nothing.

MINISTER: So he has accepted.

PRIEST: A most grudging acceptance.

SAVANT: I told you he'd get coy and start making excuses.

MINISTER: Please, O Priest, be obliging.

QUEEN: Be sure that our hearts are all with you at this moment.

PRIEST: Not all of you.

MINISTER: Pay no heed to him. Pretend he's not here. Won't our three voices suffice?

SAVANT: I said I would join my voice to yours – what more do you want of me?

PRIEST: I don't want your voice to be with ours – it's enough to have one doubting voice to spoil the rest.

SAVANT: And what's my voice to you? Is it being addressed to you or to the Heavens? Leave it to the Heavens to listen or not, whether you yourself accept or not.

MINISTER: That is reasonable.

QUEEN: Truly. Leave the matter to the Heavens, oh venerable Priest, and don't bother yourself about it. Who knows? Maybe, unbeknownst to us, it will be acceptable.

PRIEST: So be it!

QUEEN: Then let us all pray.

PRIEST: Pray! Lift up your hands with me! Oh gods!

ALL (*lifting up their hands and calling out*): Oh gods! Oh gods!

CURTAIN

### Act Two — The Cockroach's Struggle

*A bedroom with a bed, a wardrobe, and a small table on which rests an alarm clock. A large table stands between two chairs: on it are papers and books. The room has a small door leading to the bathroom, which contains a bath and a basin with a mirror above it, also a shelf on which are toothbrushes and tubes of toothpaste. From the bedroom another door opens onto the rest of the flat. The room is rather dark; day is beginning to dawn, light seeping through the room. As it gets lighter, Adil suddenly sits up and then gets out of bed; he performs various vigorous gymnastic movements. His wife Samia wakes up and half rises in the bed. She puts on a small bedside light.*

SAMIA (*turning to her husband*): You're up, Adil?

ADIL: Of course.

SAMIA: Has the alarm gone off?

ADIL: Of course not – as usual I got up by myself.

SAMIA: What an odd alarm! Didn't we set it for six before going to bed?

ADIL: We did – as we do every night. However, it waits till I get up by myself and then rings. (*The alarm clock goes off.*)

SAMIA: There – it's ringing.

ADIL: It does it on purpose, I assure you.

SAMIA: No harm done so long as you're . . .

ADIL: As I'm ringing in its stead?

SAMIA: And that you wake up on time.

ADIL: For you that's all that matters.

*He moves towards the bathroom.*

SAMIA: Where are you going?

ADIL: To the bathroom of course.

SAMIA (*jumping out of bed*): Off with you – I'm first.

ADIL: Yes, as usual. I get up before you and it's you who get to the bathroom before me.

SAMIA: That's only right.



ADIL: How is it right? As I wake up before you I should have the bathroom first. From today onwards I'm sticking to my rights.

SAMIA: You say that every day – it's a record I've heard only too often.

ADIL: Because it's my right! It's my right, I say!

SAMIA: Off with you! Don't waste time! I'm going in before you because my work demands . . .

ADIL: Your work! I suppose I'm out of work? If you're a company employee, I happen to be also employed by the same company, and if you're in a hurry so am I. Besides, I've got to shave which you haven't.

SAMIA: I've got something more important than having to shave.

ADIL: And what might that be?

SAMIA: To do my make-up, my dear man. You don't have to make up.

ADIL: And what do you have to make up for when you're going off to work in an oils, paints, and chemicals factory?

SAMIA: What a fatuous question!

ADIL: Give me an answer.

SAMIA: Listen! Don't waste any more time. Please get away from the bathroom and let me in.

ADIL: No, you don't! Today I'll not weaken – I'll stick to my rights. I'll not give in today.

SAMIA: You're rebelling?

ADIL: Yes.

SAMIA: You say 'yes'?

ADIL: Yes.

SAMIA: And you repeat it?

ADIL: Yes.

SAMIA: I warn you. This is a warning.

ADIL: What are you going to do?

SAMIA: Get out of my way – at once!

ADIL: Only over my dead body!

SAMIA: Is that so? All right, then!

*She pushes him roughly. He almost falls, but catches hold of the bed.*

ADIL: Good God! Have you gone crazy, Samia? Why are you shoving me about like this?

SAMIA: It's you who wants to use force. Everything can be settled nice and quietly. 'Bye!

*She enters the bathroom. He hurries after her. She locks the bathroom door in his face. He raps on it.*

ADIL: Open it! Open it! This is no way to behave! It's not a question of force. You seize your rights by force – I mean my rights. It's my right. You seize my right by sheer force. Open up! Open up!

SAMIA (*inside the bathroom – she is doing her hair in front of the mirror and humming to herself*): Please shut up. Don't annoy me by knocking like that!

ADIL: By what right do you go in before me?

SAMIA: I came in and there's an end to it.

ADIL: But it's a matter of principle.

SAMIA: A matter of what?

ADIL: Of principle – of principles. Don't you know what principles are?

SAMIA: I haven't yet read the morning papers.

ADIL: What are you talking about?

SAMIA: I'm telling you to occupy yourself usefully until I've finished having my bath.

ADIL: Occupy myself?

SAMIA: Yes, with anything, because I want quiet – quiet.

ADIL: Quiet? You tell me to be quiet?

SAMIA: Listen, Adil, turn on the radio.

ADIL: Turn on what?

SAMIA (*turning on the basin tap*): Turn the tap on.

ADIL: The tap? You want me to turn the tap on for you as well? But the tap's where you are.

SAMIA: I told you to turn on the radio.

ADIL: The radio?

SAMIA: Yes, the radio.

ADIL: You said the tap.

SAMIA: The tap? Would I be so crazy as to say such a thing? I told you to turn on the radio! The radio! Can you hear me properly?

ADIL: I'm sorry, it's my fault. It's always my fault.

SAMIA (*moistening the toothbrush and taking up the tube of toothpaste*): What horrible toothpaste! One of your lordship's purchases!

ADIL (*going towards the radio standing on the table*): Why am I so weak with you? But – but is it really weakness? No, it's impossible – it's merely that I spoil you. I spoil you because you're a woman, a weak woman, the weaker sex.

*(He turns on the radio and the voice of the announcer bursts forth.)*

ANNOUNCER: And here is the summary of the news: The black nationals rose up in revolt following the occupation by the white colonialists by force of . . .

ADIL *(lowering the volume)*: They rose up in revolt!

SAMIA: I told you to turn on the radio.

ADIL: It's on.

SAMIA: But I can't hear any singing or music.

ADIL: It's the news. The news! Am I also responsible for the radio programmes?

SAMIA: Turn to another station, man.

ADIL: As you say.

*He turns to another station and a song is heard:*

*'The attainment of desires is not by hoping;  
Things of this world are gained by striving.'*

SAMIA *(humming the song to herself in the bathroom)*: 'Things of this world are gained . . .'

ADIL: Happy?

SAMIA: Of course - it's a beautiful song.

ADIL: Things of this world are gained by striving! *(He lowers the volume.)*

ADIL *(forcefully)*: Look here, Samia! Open up! Open up! I want to say something important to you!

SAMIA: I haven't had my bath yet.

ADIL: I want to know, I want a quick explanation: Who am I?

SAMIA: What are you saying?

ADIL: I'm asking you who I am.

SAMIA: What a question! You're Adil of course.

ADIL: Adil who?

SAMIA: Adil my husband.

ADIL: Is that all?

SAMIA: What do you mean? Do you want your surname, job, and date of birth? It's all written down for you on your identity card.

ADIL: I know. I wasn't asking about that. I was asking about my true identity. Do you know what my true identity is?

SAMIA: No, you tell me.

ADIL: I'm the world!

SAMIA: The world?

ADIL: Yes, the world that is gained by striving. You take everything I have and I take nothing of yours. You get hold of the whole of my salary and I can't touch a millieme of yours. All the payments, expenses, bills, instalments, all come out of my pocket: *your dressmaker - your hairdresser - the instalments on your car - your petrol - your 'fridge - your washing machine - your Butagas . . .*

SAMIA: My Butagas? Talking about the Butagas, listen, Adil - don't forget to get in touch with them to send a fresh bottle.

ADIL: And it's I who always has to get in touch!

SAMIA: I've got work to do as you know.

ADIL: And I've got no work? Your job's *work* and mine's play?

SAMIA: Won't you stop tyrannizing me with your chatter!

ADIL: And now it's I who tyrannize you!

SAMIA: Please - I've got a headache. I want to have my bath in peace - in peace, do you hear? I've told you a thousand times to occupy yourself with something, man. Read the morning paper, take a needle and thread and sew the buttons on your shirt, get the breakfast ready . . .

ADIL: Shall I get your breakfast?

SAMIA: Yes, instead of talking a lot of rubbish.

ADIL *(sitting on his bed and placing his head in the palms of his hands)*: Ah . . .

SAMIA: Why are you so quiet? *(Adil remains gloomily immersed in silence.)* Adil! *(Adil does not reply. He gets up and walks about the room.)* Why are you so quiet, Adil? What are you doing out there? *(Adil does not reply but stands himself in front of her framed photo standing on the table by the bed.)* Why don't you reply, Adil? Are you in the room?

ADIL: Yes, in the room.

SAMIA: What are you doing now?

ADIL: I'm looking at your picture.

*He is in fact looking at the picture - but with fury; he makes a gesture of wanting to strangle her.*

SAMIA: Are you looking at my picture?

ADIL: Yes - with longing.

SAMIA: Is this the time for it? I told you to do something useful.

ADIL: Such as?

SAMIA: Go to the kitchen and put on the milk to heat until the



cook comes. By the way, did you turn on the Butagas? I'll be lighting the water heater in a while - are you listening?

ADIL: I'm listening.

SAMIA: Hurry up and do it, please.

ADIL: Certainly. This is unnatural. It must be that I'm not a normal person. *(He knocks at the bathroom door.)*

SAMIA *(cleaning her teeth and rinsing her mouth)*: What do you want?

ADIL *(shouting)*: I'm not a normal person! Can you hear? Not normal!

SAMIA: Not normal? Who's not normal?

ADIL: I'm not - I'm not normal.

SAMIA: Are you ill?

ADIL: I shall carry out your orders: the Butagas - the heater - the bath - the heater - the bath - the Butagas - the heater - the bath - the bath - the bath -

SAMIA: Hurry up, Adil!

ADIL: Right away. *(He goes to the telephone on the table, lifts the receiver and dials a number.)* Hullo. Hullo. Raafat? Good morning, Raafat. Listen. Listen. No, no, I'm not upset. Do you think I sound upset? No, no, not at all. I . . . I'm only . . . tell me: are you awake? Ah, of course you're awake seeing that you're talking to me. No, no . . . I meant . . . have you had your bath? Oh yes . . . good. No, I haven't done anything yet. I got up early. That's the root of the problem. Tell me, talking about baths . . . yes, baths . . . has your wife . . . no, sorry . . . it's a stupid question. No, no, nothing. I only wanted to talk to you, merely to . . . merely to . . . nothing. Yes. Yes. Nothing at all. No, no . . . don't be alarmed. I'm only . . . actually, I feel that I'm . . . yes, I'm not completely all right. No, it's not all that bad. Of course I'll go out. Yes, we'll meet at the factory as usual. Samia . . . she's in the bath. In the bath, old man . . . in the bath. I'll give her your regards. No, no, don't worry yourself. I'm fine . . . fine, Raafat. 'Bye. 'Bye.

*During the telephone conversation Samia has been trying in vain to put on the water heater. At last, as Adil puts down the receiver, she opens the door.*

SAMIA: Your lordship was chatting on the telephone while I thought you'd gone to the kitchen to put on the Butagas.

ADIL: A hurried conversation.

SAMIA: With someone at the company?

ADIL: With a lady.

SAMIA: A lady?

ADIL: Yes, a lady . . . a friend.

SAMIA: Do I know her?

ADIL: No, she's a new friend - a most pleasant person.

SAMIA: Married?

ADIL: Of course not.

SAMIA: Someone who works in the company?

ADIL: No, someone far away from that atmosphere. Just a lady, a beautiful lady, a refined lady, amenable and unassuming.

SAMIA: Adil, this is no time for these glorious imaginings.

ADIL: Imaginings?

SAMIA: Of course, imaginings. After five years of marriage, don't you think I know what you are?

ADIL: And what am I?

SAMIA: Don't go on asking me that question every moment. Will you please note that I haven't yet had my bath, that I haven't done my hair, in fact haven't done a thing up until now except to talk nonsense with my respected husband. I haven't even lit the heater because you've refused to be serious and have just sat around chatting on the phone.

ADIL: God Almighty!

SAMIA *(motioning to him to go to the kitchen)*: Do you mind?

ADIL *(making his way meekly to the kitchen)*: Why trouble to say 'do you mind'? You know I'll comply with the order.

SAMIA: Of course I know that. *(She examines her hair in the mirror.)*

ADIL *(from offstage, in the kitchen)*: Of course. I'm now in the kitchen turning on the Butagas for you.

SAMIA: Thank you. *(She goes to the heater in the bathroom and lights it as she hums to herself.)*

ADIL *(from offstage)*: And the bottle of milk by the door - I'm taking it in and putting it on to heat. Any other orders?

*Samia continues humming to herself.*

ADIL *(entering, wiping his hands and singing)*: The attainment of desires is not by hoping.

SAMIA *(going towards the bathroom door)*: Adil, pass me the towel, will you?

ADIL *(passes her the towel)*: The towel.

SAMIA: And the bathrobe too.

ADIL (*presenting her with the bathrobe*): And the bathrobe. You've got the soap and sponge?

SAMIA: The bottle of eau-de-Cologne please.

ADIL (*passing her the bottle*): And the eau-de-Cologne.

SAMIA: And the tin of powder.

*Adil passes her the powder.*

SAMIA: And now get out!

ADIL: I'm out!

*Samia closes the door of the bathroom and walks forward, humming to herself, towards the bath. She no sooner looks inside it than she lets out a scream.*

ADIL (*sitting with lowered head and then rising up in alarm at her scream*): What's wrong?

SAMIA (*opening the door of the bathroom and screaming*): Adil! Adil! Come quickly and look!

ADIL (*going towards the bathroom*): What is it? What's happened?

SAMIA (*pointing to the inside of the bath*): Look!

ADIL (*looks into the bath*): It's a cockroach.

SAMIA: Of course it's a cockroach, but how did it get in here?

ADIL: In the same way any cockroach gets into a house.

SAMIA: I mean here, into the tub, into the bath.

ADIL: Perhaps it fell from the ceiling.

SAMIA: The bath must be cleaned at once, but first it must be killed.

ADIL: Killed?

SAMIA: At once. You've got the insecticide in the kitchen.

ADIL: It's I who's going to be entrusted with killing it?

SAMIA: Of course.

ADIL: Of course, but look! It's going to come out by itself.

SAMIA: It would be better if it came out by itself because killing it in the bath will make a mess.

ADIL: Yes, it would be preferable if it were to come out nice and quietly so that it doesn't dirty the bath for you.

SAMIA: And when it comes out you can deal with it far away.

ADIL: Yes, far away from you.

SAMIA (*looking into the bath*): It doesn't look as if it will be able to.

ADIL (*looking closely*): It's trying.

SAMIA: It's slipping.

ADIL: The walls of the bath are slippery.

SAMIA: Yes, no sooner does it start climbing than it slips and falls.

ADIL: But it goes on trying.

SAMIA: And goes on again and again.

ADIL: With the same procedure.

SAMIA (*continuing to look*): Yes. Yes.

ADIL: Look, Samia. With all its strength it's climbing up the slippery wall.

SAMIA: And there it is slipping back again. There – it's fallen all the way back.

ADIL: And it's starting off to repeat the attempt.

SAMIA: Up it goes, up it goes. It's slipped! It's slipped! It's fallen!

ADIL: Don't you notice something, Samia?

SAMIA: What?

ADIL: That it's always at the same place.

SAMIA: Approximately a third of the way to the top of the bath.

ADIL: Yes, then it falls.

SAMIA: So it's unable to climb more than that.

ADIL: Because the walls of the bath are less steep near the bottom, which makes climbing easier. After that, though, it's straight up.

SAMIA: That's not the reason. Cockroaches can easily climb up a perpendicular wall, also along a ceiling. The reason is because it's slippery – no wall or ceiling is as slippery as this.

ADIL: How then can a cockroach climb up a wall of porcelain tiles, which is as slippery as this bath-tub?

SAMIA: And who told you that cockroaches can climb up a porcelain tile wall?

ADIL: Can't they?

SAMIA: Have you ever seen it?

ADIL: I rather imagined I had.

SAMIA: Imagined you had? So your lordship is imagining things!

ADIL: And you – have you seen it?

SAMIA: No, and so long as I have not seen a cockroach climbing up a wall of porcelain tiles I am unable to say that it could happen.

ADIL: Sounds logic.

SAMIA: Aren't you pleased with my logic?

ADIL: Did I say I wasn't? I was wondering, merci wondering. Is it impossible that something one hasn't seen with one's own eyes can happen?

SAMIA: Whoever said such a thing?



ADIL: I imagined you said something like that.

SAMIA: You imagined! Once again you're imagining things. Please don't imagine!

ADIL: As you say. I shall not imagine any more. As you wish me to be so positivistic, allow me to look in the dictionary.

SAMIA: Look for what?

ADIL: For the habits of cockroaches. Just a moment.

*He hurries to the shelf of books by the bed and brings back a dictionary.*

SAMIA: Hurry up, please.

ADIL (*turning over the pages*): Right away. Co . . . cock . . . cockroach, also known as black-beetle.

SAMIA: Black-beetle?

ADIL: Yes, black-beetle.

SAMIA: I prefer the word cockroach.

ADIL: I too.

SAMIA: What else does the dictionary say?

ADIL: The cockroach or black-beetle is a harmful insect that infests cloth, food, and paper. It is often found in lavatories and has long hairy horns or whiskers. It spoils more food than it actually requires as nourishment. It can live for about a year.

SAMIA: A year? It lives for a year?

ADIL: If it's not done away with and is left to enjoy its life.

SAMIA: Spoiling our food and clothes!

ADIL (*closing the dictionary*): That's all it says in the dictionary.

SAMIA: And now?

ADIL: And now what?

SAMIA: Are we going to go on like this looking at the cockroach?

ADIL: It's an enjoyable spectacle - don't you find it so?

SAMIA: What about the work we've got to do?

ADIL: Quite right - work.

SAMIA: We've got to put an end to it.

ADIL: And how do we put an end to it? This is something which is not in our hands.

SAMIA: In whose hands, then?

ADIL (*pointing to the cockroach*): In its hands. It's still climbing.

SAMIA: And also still falling.

ADIL: Yes, it climbs, then it rolls over, then it falls. Note the

procedure: climbs, then slips, then rolls over, then falls to the bottom of the bath-tub.

SAMIA: It climbs, then slips, then rolls over, then falls to the bottom of the bath-tub.

ADIL: Exactly. Then it starts off again, without resting, without respite. It climbs . . .

SAMIA: Then it slips . . .

ADIL: Then it rolls over . . .

SAMIA: Then it falls . . .

ADIL: Then it climbs . . .

SAMIA: Listen, Adil - and then what?

ADIL: It hasn't had its final word.

SAMIA: I think that's plenty.

ADIL: Are you saying that to me?

SAMIA: Please, if you've got time to waste I haven't.

ADIL: Good God, and is that my fault?

SAMIA: Am I going to have my bath or aren't I?

ADIL: Go ahead! Have I stopped you?

SAMIA: And the cockroach?

ADIL: I am responsible only for myself.

SAMIA: Which means that you intend to leave it like this inside the bath?

ADIL: I think it's better to leave it as it is so that it can solve its problem by itself.

SAMIA: Are you joking, Adil? Is this a time for joking?

ADIL: On the contrary, I'm being extremely serious. Do you not see that it's still trying to save itself, so let's leave it to try.

SAMIA: Until when?

ADIL: We cannot - either you or I - decide when. That depends on its willpower - and up until now it has shown no intention of discontinuing its attempts. Look! So far it is showing no sign of being tired.

SAMIA: But I'm tired.

ADIL: Unfortunately.

SAMIA: And you? Aren't you tired?

ADIL: Of course, the same as you, but there's nothing to be done about it.

SAMIA: In short, I'm not having my bath today, or dressing, or going off to my job - all because of a cockroach which has fallen into the bath-tub and my solicitous husband who stands watching it and talking drive!

ADIL: Thank you!  
 SAMIA: As one cannot depend upon you, I suppose I must act.  
 ADIL: What are you going to do?  
 SAMIA: Get the insecticide and look after things myself.  
 ADIL: You're going to destroy the cockroach?  
 SAMIA: Right away.  
 ADIL: Then go off and bring the insecticide.  
 SAMIA: I'll do just that.

*Samia hurries off to the kitchen and Adil quickly locks the bathroom door from the inside. Samia, noting what has happened, turns back and raps at the locked door. Adil, inside the bathroom, moves towards the bath, humming to himself.*

SAMIA: What have you done, Adil? Open it!

*(Adil does not reply to her: he is looking at the cockroach in the bath.)*

SAMIA: Have you done it, Adil?  
 ADIL *(pointing at the cockroach)*: Up you go . . . up . . . up. Another step. Go on . . . go on . . .  
 SAMIA *(rapping at the door)*: Adil, open it!  
 ADIL *(to the cockroach)*: Stick to it! Stick to it! Struggle for your life!  
 SAMIA *(knocking vigorously)*: I told you to open up, Adil. Open it! Can't you hear me?  
 ADIL *(to the cockroach)*: They want to kill you with insecticide. Don't be afraid - I'll not open the door. Stick to it! Stick to it!  
 SAMIA *(rapping at the door)*: Open the door, Adil! Open up, I tell you!  
 ADIL *(to the cockroach)*: What a shame! You slipped, you rolled over and fell down as you do each time.  
 SAMIA *(rapping at the door)*: Can't you hear all this knocking?  
 ADIL *(to the cockroach)*: You want to have another go. Once again you're starting to climb. Why don't you rest a while? Rest for a moment, brother! Give yourself a breather? But what's the point? *(shouting)* There's no point!  
 SAMIA: No point? You say there's no point?  
 ADIL: Not to you!  
 SAMIA: So you've uttered at last! Are you going to open up eventually or not?

ADIL: No.  
 SAMIA: Are you saying no?  
 ADIL: Yes.  
 SAMIA: Are you saying no or yes?  
 ADIL: No and yes.  
 SAMIA: Speak intelligibly. Are you going to open up or not?  
 ADIL: I'll open up and I'll not open up.  
 SAMIA: Don't annoy me - define your attitude!  
 ADIL: You define yours!  
 SAMIA: Mine's clear - very clear.  
 ADIL: In relation to whom?  
 SAMIA: To you of course.  
 ADIL: I'm not asking about your attitude in relation to myself, I'm asking about your attitude in relation to it.  
 SAMIA: What's it?  
 ADIL: The cockroach.  
 SAMIA: No, you've really gone mad! *(The telephone rings. She hurries off to it and lifts up the receiver.)* Hullo. Who is it speaking? Ah, good morning, Mr. Raafat. No, we're not dressed yet, nor had breakfast, nor done a thing all morning - neither he nor I. He spoke to you? Ah, it was he who rang you. I have, in fact, noticed something strange about him: unnatural, sick. Yes, he's in the bathroom. No, he's locked himself in. A cockroach, my dear sir. Yes, an ordinary cockroach. No. No. It's a long story. Yes, when we meet. No, I don't think he's intending to go to work. I myself am late. Quite definitely something's happened to him. No, don't you worry. The company doctor? And what can the company doctor do? I'm most grateful, Mr. Raafat. Where's Yusriyya? Good morning, Yusriyya. Your husband noticed and told you? No, don't you worry, Yusriyya. I'm very grateful to both you and Mr. Raafat. Thank you. Thank you. *(She puts down the receiver.)*

*The cook enters; she is carrying the saucepan of milk.*

COOK: Who put the milk on the fire and left it? The milk's all boiled over on to the floor and the saucepan's quite empty.  
 SAMIA *(pointing to the bathroom)*: It's his lordship.  
 COOK: And what's he been interfering in the kitchen for?  
 SAMIA: And why are you late today?  
 COOK: Transport.



SAMIA: Jam packed, not even a place to stand, isn't that so?

COOK: Exactly.

SAMIA: I know your excuse, know it in advance!

COOK: Shall I prepare the breakfast?

SAMIA: Breakfast? You'd better wait till we see where it's all going to end. *(She points at the bathroom.)*

COOK *(looking towards the bathroom)*: It's him?

SAMIA: Yes, inside - he's locked himself in.

COOK: Why? I hope nothing's wrong.

SAMIA: The cockroach.

COOK: Cockroach?

SAMIA: Look here, Umm Attiya, did you clean the bath well yesterday?

COOK: Of course, Ma'am - with carbolic acid.

SAMIA: Impossible.

COOK: The bottle's along by the kitchen.

SAMIA: You're sure?

COOK: I swear to you.

SAMIA: Then where's this wretched cockroach come from?

COOK: From the skylight, from the stairs, from the pipes, from out of the cracks in the walls - however much you clean a house it's bound to have cockroaches and ants.

*All this time Adil has been in the bathroom engrossed in watching the cockroach. He makes gestures to it as he follows it climbing up and falling down; by sighs and miming he expresses all his emotions and concern.*

SAMIA *(suddenly shouting)*: Oh, and where's it all going to end? My poor nerves! My poor nerves!

COOK: Shall I bring you a cup of tea?

SAMIA: No, you go about your work and let me be for the moment.

COOK: The insecticide's along by the kitchen, Ma'am. I'll bring it and . . .

SAMIA: I know the insecticide's in the kitchen but the trouble is . . . Off you go and let me alone, Umm Attiya - I know what I'm about.

COOK: As you say, Ma'am. *(She goes out.)*

SAMIA *(going towards the bathroom and rapping at the door)*: Listen, Adil, I want to have a few words with you. Are you listening?

ADIL *(without moving or interrupting his watching of the cockroach)*: I'm listening.

SAMIA: I think things have gone on quite long enough.

ADIL *(automatically echoing her words)*: Long enough.

SAMIA: And there's a limit to one's patience.

ADIL: One's patience.

SAMIA: And my nerves are in ribbons.

ADIL: In ribbons.

SAMIA: And you're behaving ridiculously.

ADIL: Ridiculously.

SAMIA *(shouting)*: This is unbearable! Won't you answer me?

Answer anything! Answer! Answer! Answer!

ADIL: Answer! Answer! Answer!

SAMIA *(leaving the bathroom door in despair)*: It's hopeless! There's no longer any point in speaking to that creature. He just repeats my words like a parrot. We've now got a cockroach and a parrot in the bathroom!

COOK *(entering)*: Today you're both later than usual, Ma'am.

SAMIA: Of course.

COOK: Today's a holiday?

SAMIA: It's not a holiday or anything of the sort - it's a working day as usual.

COOK: All right but . . .

SAMIA: But what? His lordship's locked himself up in the bathroom and doesn't want to open it, nor does he want to answer me. I've given up knocking and trying to talk to him. I've come to the end of my tether with him . . . there's no way of making contact with him.

COOK: Seeing that he's bolted himself in . . .

SAMIA: There's only one way.

COOK: Let's try it.

SAMIA: Do you know what it is?

COOK: No.

SAMIA: Break down the door.

COOK: Break down the bathroom door?

SAMIA: Yes.

COOK: And who's going to do that?

SAMIA: Can't you?

COOK: Me?

SAMIA: Certainly, you'd not be able to.

COOK: It's a solid door and would need a carpenter . . .

SAMIA: Go and fetch a carpenter.

COOK: There's no carpenter near-by in the district.

SAMIA: What's to be done?

COOK: Leave it in the hands of the Almighty. We'll let him be for a while until he gets fed up and opens up of his own accord.  
 SAMIA: He won't get fed up. So long as that wretched thing's got a breath of life in it.

COOK: But he'll have to come out so as to go to work.

SAMIA: He'll forget work or pretend to. I know him - sometimes he forgets himself. Many times he's unable to get any control over himself or over his time.

COOK: And your own work, Ma'am?

SAMIA: That's the trouble. I can't go without him because they'll ask me about him. What shall I say to them? Shall I say that he hasn't turned up to work because he's engrossed in watching a cockroach in the bath?

COOK: Say that he's tired, indisposed.

SAMIA: They'll immediately send round the company doctor.

COOK: Let him come and good luck to him!

SAMIA: And if he examines him and finds he's not indisposed at all?

COOK: That's true.

SAMIA: He's always getting me into such embarrassing situations. If I weren't always alongside him to rescue him and guide him he'd get into any number of scrapes.

COOK: May the Almighty keep you and give you strength!

SAMIA: He always yields to me, he never disobeys me.

COOK: That's evident.

SAMIA: What's happened to him then this morning? I said to him: Open up! Open up! but he seemed stone-deaf.

COOK: All his life he's paid attention to what you have to say.

SAMIA: Except for today. I don't know what's happened to him.

COOK: Somebody's put the evil eye on him.

SAMIA: And where will be the end of it?

COOK: Be patient, Ma'am. Patience is a virtue.

SAMIA: My patience has run out, it's finished, it's had it!

COOK (*looking in the direction of the bathroom*): But you mean to say that all he's doing is just watching a cockroach?

SAMIA: You don't believe it?

COOK: Honestly, Ma'am, if it weren't that I believe every word you say I'd not make head or tail of it.

SAMIA: Of course - this wouldn't happen with a normal man.

COOK: Shall I speak to him, Ma'am?

SAMIA: You?

COOK: I'll have a go.

SAMIA: Go on!

*The cook knocks on the bathroom door. Adil, motionless, is still watching what is going on in the bath-tub.*

COOK (*she knocks again, then again and again, and finally shouts out*):  
 I'm Umm Attiya.

ADIL (*raising his head*): Umm Attiya? What do you want?

COOK: To wash the bathroom floor.

ADIL: It's forbidden.

COOK: Forbidden?

ADIL: Today it's forbidden.

COOK: I'll bring a new piece of soap for the bath.

ADIL: There's soap here.

COOK: A clean towel?

ADIL: There is one. There's everything.

COOK: Don't you need anything?

ADIL: All I need is for you to take yourself off and shut up.

COOK: Just as you say.

*The cook returns despondently to Samia.*

SAMIA: I told you it was no good.

COOK: You're quite right.

SAMIA: So what's to be done? One's got to do something, one's simply got to.

COOK: Calm down, Ma'am, and leave things to the Almighty!

SAMIA: One can't just shut up about it - one can't!

*She walks nervously about the room, while the cook watches her and sighs. There is a ring at the door.*

COOK: It's the front door!

SAMIA: Who could it be?

COOK: I'll go and see. (*She goes out.*)

SAMIA (*standing up and listening, then calling out*): Who is it, Umm Attiya?

COOK (*entering in a state of flurry*): It's the doctor, Ma'am!

SAMIA: Doctor? What doctor?

COOK: He said he was the company doctor. I put him in the lounge.

SAMIA: The company doctor? Ah, no doubt Raafat sent him,



thinking that the situation demanded it. And now what's to be done? This is just what I feared. (*She moves towards the bathroom door and knocks.*) Adil! Open up, Adil – there's something very important.

ADIL (*his gaze directed at the inside of the bath*): I know – very important.

SAMIA: The situation's critical.

ADIL: No doubt about it. (*He points to the cockroach in the bath.*) Its situation is indeed critical, and you know its situation is critical.

SAMIA: Whose situation? I'm talking about your situation.

ADIL: That also is only too well known.

SAMIA: Open up, Adil. Open up so I can explain the situation to you.

ADIL: The situation's clear and requires no explaining.

SAMIA: You're wrong, something new's occurred: the doctor's come.

ADIL: Doctor? You've brought a doctor? – to do away with this poor thing? An entomologist of course?

SAMIA: Entomologist? What are you talking about? The doctor's come about you. Open up – the doctor's here for you.

ADIL: For me? An entomologist?

SAMIA: What entomologist, Adil? The company doctor; the company doctor's come to examine you.

ADIL (*jumping to his feet*): What's that you're saying?

SAMIA: Open up and I'll explain to you.

ADIL (*realizing what she's up to*): Open up? Not likely! I've heard that one before!

SAMIA: I'm not fooling, Adil, and I'm not playing a trick. I'm talking seriously: the company doctor has arrived and is in the lounge. It seems Raafat sent him thinking you were ill.

ADIL: Me ill?

SAMIA: So Raafat understood, and the doctor's actually come.

ADIL: If he's actually come, why don't I hear his voice?

SAMIA: He's in the lounge. I told you he was in the lounge – and please don't make him wait any longer!

ADIL: In short, you want me to open up?

SAMIA: Of course, in order to be able to deal with the question of the doctor.

ADIL: Cut this story of the doctor out!

SAMIA: Don't you believe he's here?

ADIL: If he's really come for me, let him speak to me himself.

SAMIA: You want him to come in here?

ADIL: Isn't that the normal thing?

SAMIA: All right. (*She calls out.*) Umm Attiya – ask the doctor to come in here.

COOK: Certainly, Ma'am.

*Samia hurriedly arranges her hair and clothes preparatory to meeting the doctor.*

COOK (*at the door*): Please, in here, Doctor.

SAMIA (*meeting him*): Please come in, Doctor.

DOCTOR (*enters carrying a small bag*): Good morning.

SAMIA: Good morning. It seems we've put you out for no . . .

DOCTOR: Not at all. I was already dressed and was about to leave when Mr. Raafat contacted me by telephone. I came along immediately – my house is just near-by.

SAMIA: We are extremely grateful but . . .

DOCTOR: And how does Mr. Adil feel?

SAMIA: The fact is he's . . .

DOCTOR: In any event everything will become clear when I've examined him. Where is he, might I ask?

SAMIA: He's . . . he's . . . he's here in the bathroom. I'll call him.

DOCTOR: Let him take his bath in peace.

SAMIA: He's not taking a bath. He's . . . just a moment. (*She knocks at the bathroom door.*) Adil! Open up, Adil – the doctor's waiting.

ADIL: Where is he?

SAMIA: Here in the room. Answer him, Doctor!

DOCTOR: Mr. Adil!

ADIL: Good God! It's true!

DOCTOR (*to Samia*): What's he saying?

SAMIA (*to Adil*): You believe me? Now open up!

ADIL (*opening the door of the bathroom and standing by it*): Doctor? Truly I'm most embarrassed . . .

DOCTOR: How are you now, Mr. Adil?

ADIL: I? I'm fine.

DOCTOR: Fine?

ADIL: Naturally.

SAMIA: But he felt slightly unwell early this morning.

ADIL: I?

SAMIA: Of course you. Since early this morning you haven't been feeling right.

ADIL: And you know the reason why?  
 SAMIA: Whatever the reason, the doctor's come and there's an end to it. In any case you're late for work and there's no harm in the doctor giving you a day off, isn't that so, Doctor?  
 DOCTOR: Before prescribing anything I must make an examination. Please lie down on the bed, Mr. Adil.  
 ADIL: But I . . .  
 SAMIA: Listen to what the doctor has to say, Adil, and let him examine you.  
 ADIL: Examine? And say it appears . . .  
 SAMIA: Anyway, you're run down.  
 ADIL: But that's not sufficient reason . . .  
 SAMIA: It's enough for now.  
 ADIL: I prefer him to know the real reason.  
 SAMIA: The real reason?  
 ADIL: Yes, come along, Doctor.  
 DOCTOR: Where to?  
 ADIL (*drawing him towards the bathroom*): In here.  
 SAMIA: You're mad, Adil! (*She draws the doctor away from the bathroom.*) Please, Doctor, come away.  
 ADIL: Leave him alone, Samia. Let me tell him of the real reason. (*Pulls the doctor towards him.*) Come along, Doctor.  
 SAMIA: Don't listen to him, Doctor. (*Pulls the doctor towards her.*) Come along.  
 DOCTOR (*at a loss, being pulled in opposite directions by the two of them*): Please! Please!  
 SAMIA: Let the doctor go, Adil. It's not right.  
 ADIL: You let him go!  
 SAMIA: Allow him to examine you - that's what he's come for.  
 ADIL: No, I'll tell him the real reason.  
 SAMIA: But that won't . . . won't . . .  
 ADIL: It must be done.  
 SAMIA: You don't realize what you're doing. Come here, Doctor, please. (*She pulls him.*)  
 ADIL: But the doctor is interested to know what it is I want to show him. I'm sure of that. Please, Doctor, listen to what I have to say. Come along! (*He pulls at the doctor.*)  
 DOCTOR: Excuse me! Excuse me! (*He tries to release himself from the two of them.*)  
 SAMIA: I'm sorry, Doctor, but my husband Adil doesn't appreciate . . .

ADIL: Doesn't appreciate what? In what way don't I appreciate?  
 I know exactly what I'm doing. My mind's quite made up.  
 SAMIA: I've warned you, Adil, I've warned you.  
 ADIL: I'll take the responsibility.  
 SAMIA: All right, you're free to do as you please.  
 DOCTOR (*dewildered*): What's it all about? Please - tell me.  
 ADIL (*drawing him into the bathroom*): Come along with me, Doctor, and I'll explain things to you.  
 DOCTOR (*in astonishment*): Where to?  
 ADIL (*standing in front of the bath*): Here, look! What do you see inside the bath-tub?  
 DOCTOR (*looking*): Nothing. There's no water in it.  
 ADIL: Of course there's no water in it, but isn't there something else?  
 DOCTOR: No, nothing - it's empty.  
 ADIL: Yet even so, there is something there.  
 DOCTOR: Something? Such as?  
 ADIL: Do you find it absolutely sparkling white?  
 DOCTOR: Yes, absolutely.  
 ADIL: But you can't say that it's absolutely clean.  
 DOCTOR: Who am I to criticize your cleanliness?  
 ADIL: Thank you for your kind words but the obvious truth of the matter is that there is something dirty in the bath.  
 SAMIA: So you've admitted it's dirty and must be done away with?  
 ADIL: Dirty's something and doing away with it is something else.  
 DOCTOR (*looks at them both uncomprehendingly*): If you'll allow me . . .  
 ADIL: Look down here into the bath, Doctor, and you'll understand.

*The doctor looks down with great attention.*

ADIL: Do you not see something moving?  
 DOCTOR (*without interest*): A cockroach.  
 ADIL: A cockroach? Well done!  
 DOCTOR: And so?  
 ADIL: This cockroach is the very core and essence.  
 DOCTOR: Very core and essence?  
 ADIL: Look at it well, Doctor. What do you notice about it?  
 DOCTOR: From what point of view?  
 ADIL: From the point of view of its behaviour.  
 DOCTOR: Its behaviour?  
 SAMIA: Keep quiet, Adil - let me explain to the doctor.



ADIL: No, please, Samia – let me do the speaking.  
 SAMIA: And why should I not speak? At least I won't tell it wrong.  
 ADIL: And I'll tell it wrong?  
 SAMIA: Don't complicate things for me. Let me do the talking, because I'm better than you at explaining things.  
 ADIL: Of course, but it's only I who . . .  
 SAMIA: Today you're opposing me all along the line in a quite unreasonable way.  
 ADIL: It's not opposition. I didn't mean . . . it's just . . .  
 SAMIA: Just what? Listen, Doctor . . .  
 ADIL: A moment, Samia, please! Let me speak first because I've got my own point of view.  
 SAMIA: And I too have a point of view.  
 ADIL: Of course. Of course – and your point of view is respected, very respected. But allow me a minute, one single minute and no more.  
 SAMIA: No, not even half a minute.  
 ADIL: Please, Samia.  
 SAMIA: Out of the question.  
 ADIL: Samia!  
 DOCTOR: Friends, there's no reason for all this disagreement. Explain to me first of all exactly what the problem's all about.  
 SAMIA: The problem, Doctor . . .  
 ADIL: For which of us did the Doctor come? Was it not for me? Tell me, Doctor, for whom did you come here?  
 DOCTOR: For you.  
 ADIL: For me, then it is I who shall explain to you . . .  
 DOCTOR: You or the lady – the important thing is for me to know what it's about.  
 SAMIA: Do you hear, Adil: you or I, and as I'm the woman I have priority.  
 ADIL: Heavens! Even in this, even in my own illness?  
 SAMIA: You've now admitted you're ill.  
 ADIL: In the doctor's view. Of course he has come because there's an ill person in the house, and the ill person is supposed to be me, but the fact, Doctor, is . . .  
 SAMIA: The fact is that he's . . .  
 ADIL: The fact is that I'm . . .  
 SAMIA (*violently*): Whatever next, Adil? Please, don't force me to . . .  
 ADIL: It's my fault, my fault as usual, because it's always my fault.

DOCTOR: The important thing, friends, is: what's it all about?  
 SAMIA: I'm sorry, Doctor – we're taking up too much of your time.  
 DOCTOR: No, not at all, only I'd like to understand . . .  
 SAMIA: You'll understand, Doctor, you'll understand – if he'd just shut up for a moment I'd be able to explain to you.  
 ADIL: Just the opposite.  
 SAMIA: What's just the opposite?  
 ADIL: If I keep silent he'll not understand what it's about.  
 SAMIA: Meaning that I'm incapable of making him understand, or do you mean I'm a liar and will falsify the facts?  
 ADIL: God forbid! Would I ever insinuate such a thing!  
 DOCTOR: Allow me, so as to put an end to all disagreement, just let me find out what it's about by myself. Please, Mr. Adil, please lie down on the bed so that I can examine you and then I'll know the truth for myself.  
 ADIL: No, Doctor – the truth's not to be found on the bed but in the bath.  
 DOCTOR: In the bath?  
 ADIL: Yes, in this bath – this cockroach.  
 DOCTOR: Permit me, please excuse me, but I . . . I don't understand anything at all.  
 SAMIA: It's not his fault – of course he can't understand.  
 ADIL: I'll explain the matter in a few words – listen, Doctor, look carefully at this cockroach and tell me what it's doing now?  
 DOCTOR (*looking into the bath*): What's it doing? It's doing nothing.  
 ADIL: Look carefully, Doctor.  
 DOCTOR: What are you getting at exactly?  
 SAMIA: What Adil is getting at is that . . .  
 ADIL: No, no, let the doctor discover it for himself.  
 DOCTOR (*looking intently into the bath*): Discover?  
 ADIL: Don't you see, for example, that the cockroach is trying to do something?  
 DOCTOR: Of course, it's trying to get out of the bath.  
 ADIL: Marvellous! Marvellous! We've got there.  
 DOCTOR (*looking at him*): Where have we got?  
 ADIL: To the heart of the whole matter.  
 DOCTOR (*nodding his head*): Understood. Understood. It's all quite clear now.  
 ADIL: You understand what I'm driving at, Doctor? This is the point of departure and I shall explain my attitude to you.  
 DOCTOR: No, no, there's no need to explain – I've understood.

(*He goes out of the bathroom and whispers to Samia*) Might I have a word with you?

SAMIA (*following him*): Of course, Doctor, go ahead.

DOCTOR (*whispering*): He's really overdoing it. How many hours does he work at the factory?

SAMIA: The usual hours, but there's something else to it.

DOCTOR: Does he do other work?

SAMIA: He is preparing a thesis for his doctorate, but this condition of his . . .

DOCTOR: Understood, Understood. He's certainly in need of rest. I'll write down for him all that's necessary. Would you allow me, Mr. Adil?

ADIL (*coming out of the bathroom*): What, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Nothing - it's just that having visited you at home in my capacity of company doctor, I must examine you, if only for the purpose of establishing that I've been here.

ADIL: But I'm not ill.

DOCTOR: I know that, but I am required to put in a report and the report must show that an examination has been made.

ADIL: You came in an official capacity?

DOCTOR: Of course.

ADIL: Ah, in that case I must help you. However, what are you going to write in your report seeing that I'm not ill?

DOCTOR: Leave things to me. First of all, would you just lie down here on the bed.

ADIL: I've put on weight these last years.

DOCTOR: That's obvious - you're getting flabby before your time.

SAMIA: He's grown himself a real paunch!

ADIL: From fatty food - Umm Attiya's cooking!

DOCTOR: Maybe also from lack of exercise.

ADIL: I've got no time for exercise.

DOCTOR: You overdo things at work.

ADIL: I have to.

DOCTOR (*examining his chest and back with the stethoscope*): Take a deep breath. Enough, Enough. Do you smoke?

ADIL: A little.

DOCTOR: Drink a lot of coffee?

ADIL: A couple of cups a day.

DOCTOR: Alcohol? Drugs?

ADIL: No, no. Never, never.

DOCTOR: You naturally sometimes stay up late at night.

ADIL: Sometimes, when my work requires me to, but in any case it's never later than midnight.

DOCTOR: Do you sleep well?

ADIL: Like a log.

DOCTOR: Do you have unpleasant dreams?

ADIL: Neither pleasant nor unpleasant, I don't dream at all.

DOCTOR: Perhaps you dream and don't remember your dreams.

ADIL: Maybe.

DOCTOR: You don't suffer from anything unusual?

ADIL: No, not at all.

DOCTOR: Thank you.

*The doctor sets about writing out his prescription to one side of the room.*

SAMIA (*approaching the doctor*): I hope everything's all right, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Fine, everything's just fine - he's in splendid health, thanks be to God. There's not a thing wrong with him. I'll write him out a prescription for some tranquilizers and give him three days' sick leave.

SAMIA: Three days?

DOCTOR: Too little?

SAMIA: No, it's a lot, too much.

ADIL (*jumping to his feet*): What's too much?

SAMIA: The doctor wants to give you three days' sick leave.

ADIL: Three days?

SAMIA: One day's plenty, Doctor.

ADIL: Of course one day, and there wasn't even any reason to have today off if it hadn't been that you came, Doctor - so as to justify your coming here.

DOCTOR: As you say - one day, my dear sir.

ADIL: Thank you, Doctor.

DOCTOR: On condition that you stay in bed.

ADIL: Stay in bed?

DOCTOR: It's necessary.

ADIL: And what's the necessity?

DOCTOR: For complete rest and relaxation.

ADIL: And if I find complete rest and relaxation somewhere else?

DOCTOR: Where?

ADIL: In the bathroom, for example?



SAMIA: Do you hear, Doctor? He'll be spending the day in the bathroom.

DOCTOR: There's no harm in his taking a warm bath, it'll help him to relax.

SAMIA: He'll not be taking a bath at all, neither warm nor cold.

DOCTOR: What, then, will he do in the bathroom?

SAMIA: Ask him.

ADIL: I shall watch the cockroach. What's wrong with that?

SAMIA: You've heard with your very own ears, haven't you, Doctor?

DOCTOR: The cockroach? Again?

ADIL: Come along to the bath with me and I'll explain things to you.

DOCTOR (*looking at his watch*): Another time, it's getting late and I've got some urgent work to do.

ADIL: My explanation will take no more than a minute.

DOCTOR: I promise to visit you again shortly when, God willing, your nerves will have calmed down.

ADIL: My nerves are perfectly calm. I would have liked you to stay for a while so that . . .

DOCTOR: I'll come back. I'll come back.

ADIL: When?

DOCTOR: In the afternoon. In the afternoon.

ADIL: When you return in the afternoon everything will have changed.

DOCTOR: What will have changed?

ADIL: The cockroach will — will have been destroyed. Do you think my wife will leave things as they are?

SAMIA: Of course not. You can't stop me from using the bath the whole day — it's unreasonable.

ADIL (*to the doctor*): Do you hear?

SAMIA: Judge, Doctor! Don't I have to go off to my work at the factory? Hasn't his lordship already made me late enough?

ADIL: Doctor, it's not I who've made her late. Her being late has another reason. Ask her about it!

SAMIA: What's the other reason?

ADIL: Your insistence on taking a bath today.

SAMIA: Ask him, Doctor, what the reason was for my not taking a bath today.

ADIL: I'll tell you the reason, Doctor: the reason is that she wants to destroy this cockroach.

SAMIA: There you are, Doctor!

DOCTOR: The fact is that the question . . .

ADIL: I'm certain, Doctor, you'll come down on the side of truth, for the question is clear.

SAMIA: Of course it's clear, but don't try to influence the doctor. He understands everything.

ADIL: I'm not trying to influence the doctor. It's you who from the very beginning were trying to influence him, but he understands perfectly my purpose.

SAMIA: Your purpose?

ADIL: Of course.

SAMIA: Tell us, Doctor: have you really understood anything of him?

ADIL: And have you understood anything of her, Doctor?

SAMIA: Answer, Doctor!

ADIL: Yes, answer!

DOCTOR (*at a loss between the two of them*): The truth of the matter is I . . . is I . . .

ADIL: Listen, Doctor; the essence of the matter can be put into a few words: put yourself in the same position.

DOCTOR: Your position?

ADIL: The position of the cockroach.

DOCTOR (*hurriedly taking up his bag*): No — please excuse me.

*He rushes out with Samia and Adil in his wake calling out to him.*

SAMIA: Wait, Doctor!

ADIL: Just a moment, Doctor!

CURTAIN

### Act Three - The Fate of the Cockroach

*The same scene less than a minute later. Samia and Adil are returning to the room after the doctor's hasty departure.*

ADIL: Why did the doctor leave like that?  
SAMIA: Ask yourself.  
ADIL: Ask myself? Why? Did I do anything wrong?  
SAMIA: You? From the moment you woke up this morning you haven't stopped doing things wrong.  
ADIL: Good Heavens!  
SAMIA: We woke up in the morning in fine shape, got ourselves ready to go out to work, and then your lordship causes us all this unnecessary delay.  
ADIL: It's I who've caused it?  
SAMIA: Your cockroach!  
ADIL: And was it I who placed it in the bath?  
SAMIA: What it amounts to is that you've got the day off - official sick leave. As for me, I've got to go off to my work. It's true I'm late but I'll make the best of it and give as an excuse your being ill and the company doctor coming to the house.

*The doctor reappears.*

DOCTOR: Please excuse me! I went off in a most impolite manner.  
ADIL: No, don't mention it, Doctor.  
DOCTOR: I was afraid I'd be late for my other work. On thinking it over, though, I feel that my prime duty lies here. I have therefore returned quickly to ask that I might continue my examination of the case.  
SAMIA: Thank you, Doctor.  
DOCTOR: I'd like to have a word in private with your wife - would you allow me, Mr. Adil?  
ADIL: Of course. Of course. I'll go into the bathroom.  
DOCTOR: Take your time!  
*Adil goes into the bathroom and locks the door on himself. He goes*

*back to watching the bath with interest. He makes signs and gestures as he follows the cockroach's movements, like someone following a game of chess.*

SAMIA: Is anything wrong, Doctor?  
DOCTOR: I want to ask you about certain things.  
SAMIA: Go ahead!  
DOCTOR: My questions will perhaps be a trifle embarrassing in that they may touch upon some personal aspects, but my duty as a practising doctor demands that I do so. May I put my questions?  
SAMIA: Of course, Doctor, go ahead!  
DOCTOR: What's your opinion about your husband's personality?  
SAMIA: In what respect?  
DOCTOR: In respect of strength and weakness.  
SAMIA: In relation to whom?  
DOCTOR: In relation to yourself of course.  
SAMIA: I . . . I believe his personality to be weaker than mine.  
DOCTOR: Does he know it?  
SAMIA: Certainly.  
DOCTOR: He has told you so openly?  
SAMIA: No, but he believes it deep inside him.  
DOCTOR: How do you know?  
SAMIA: He is always stating that I boss him and make him obey my orders and tyrannize him.  
DOCTOR: Tyrannize him?  
SAMIA: That's what he says.  
DOCTOR: Then he believes or imagines that you are tyrannizing him?  
SAMIA: Yes.  
DOCTOR: My diagnosis is appropriate.  
SAMIA: What diagnosis?  
DOCTOR: This question of the cockroach.  
SAMIA: And what's the connection?  
DOCTOR: You want to do away with the cockroach and he wants to save it from your hands.  
SAMIA: You mean, Doctor . . .  
DOCTOR: Yes, in his inner consciousness he has identified himself with the cockroach, and this is the secret of his concern and affection for it.  
SAMIA: Extraordinary! D'you think so, Doctor?  
DOCTOR: There can be no other reason.



SAMIA: But . . .

DOCTOR: This is a very obvious example from modern psychology. I am not a specialist in psychiatry, but I have made a private study of it as a hobby and I am indeed lucky to have come across this case today.

SAMIA: Are you certain it's a psychological state?

DOCTOR: A typical case.

SAMIA: Can it be treated?

DOCTOR: The treatment is easy, extremely easy.

SAMIA: Whatever you order me to do I shall carry out immediately.

DOCTOR: The treatment requires no more than your persuading your husband that there is no similarity between him and the cockroach.

SAMIA: And how shall I persuade him?

DOCTOR: That's the problem.

SAMIA: A way must be found.

DOCTOR: First of all you must on your side show affection for the cockroach.

SAMIA: Show affection for the cockroach?

DOCTOR: That's essential, because any hurt done by you to the cockroach would, in your husband's view, be a hurt done to him personally.

SAMIA: But this is madness.

DOCTOR: Naturally - it's a pathological condition.

SAMIA: But he's perfectly sane. Up until this morning he could not have been more balanced in all his behaviour, performing his company work perfectly well.

DOCTOR: He is in fact extremely well balanced and will always be able to perform his company work in the best possible manner, of that I'm sure.

SAMIA: Then he's a normal person.

DOCTOR: Normal in all things except one - that of the cockroach.

SAMIA: That's right, no sooner is the cockroach mentioned than . . .

DOCTOR: Than he begins to speak and act strangely.

SAMIA: That is so.

DOCTOR: Yet even so there's no cause for worry. With a little wisdom and patience, kindness and adjustment, we shall quickly be able to sort things out for the best.

SAMIA: You may be confident, Doctor, that I shall employ both wisdom and patience and shall be kind and compliant with him in everything he wants.

DOCTOR: That is all that is now required, so let's begin trying.

SAMIA: Yes, we shall try.

DOCTOR: First of all, we must go along and participate in what he's doing.

SAMIA (*she goes with the doctor behind her and gently knocks on the bathroom door*): Adil!

ADIL (*getting to his feet and opening the door to them*): Have you finished your little private talk?

SAMIA: Yes, the doctor was advising me . . .

DOCTOR: To put you on a special diet. I'd like you to be a little slimmer.

ADIL: Slimmer? Me?

DOCTOR: Why not? Do you want to let your body get flabby?

ADIL: Has my wife complained about my physique?

DOCTOR: No, I'm talking medically - an increase in weight leads to lethargy, and you are in need of energy.

ADIL: I'm exceedingly energetic, extremely energetic, which can be seen from the fact that I wake up in the morning before the alarm goes off. Ask Samia.

SAMIA: Quite correct.

DOCTOR: Then you admit your husband possesses this quality.

SAMIA: No doubt about it - he's exceedingly energetic.

DOCTOR: Do you hear that, Mr. Adil? Your wife is being very complimentary about you.

ADIL: She can't deny I'm energetic, though of course I'm not as energetic as this cockroach.

DOCTOR: The cockroach? Ah, yes, of course.

ADIL: Look, Doctor. Look, Samia. It's still struggling - with the same perseverance. I tried to catch it out slacking or giving up, but never . . . never . . . never.

SAMIA (*looking into the bath-tub with feigned interest*): It's certainly courageous.

ADIL: And what courage!

SAMIA: I've begun to love it.

ADIL (*looking at her*): Love it?

SAMIA: Yes, doesn't its courage deserve love?

ADIL: You wanted to destroy it with insecticide.

SAMIA: I was stupid.

ADIL: Thanks be to God!

SAMIA: Look at its whiskers - they're beautiful!

ADIL: Whose whiskers?

SAMIA: The cockroach's of course.

ADIL: Its whiskers are beautiful?  
 SAMIA: Don't you think so?  
 ADIL: You making fun of me?  
 SAMIA: Of you? No, no - I swear to you, Adil. Please don't be angry. I swear to you I'm not making fun of you. I'm being absolutely serious now. I'm sincere in what I say, and when I say that its whiskers please me, be sure that I really mean it.  
 ADIL: And since when did you discover its whiskers were so beautiful?  
 SAMIA: Since . . . since a moment ago when I looked carefully at it.  
 ADIL: I myself have been looking carefully at it from early morning and can't find anything beautiful about it.  
 SAMIA: You're being modest.  
 ADIL: Modest? Me? What's the connection?  
 SAMIA: Oh none, none at all.  
 DOCTOR: Certainly there's no connection whatsoever.  
 SAMIA: Of course, Adil, be sure there's no connection.  
 ADIL (*looking at the two of them*): What's all this confusion about?  
 SAMIA: Nothing at all, Adil - everything's quite in order. All that's happened is that the doctor and I have come to understand your point of view completely.  
 DOCTOR: Certainly. Certainly.  
 ADIL (*doubting them*): And what is my point of view?  
 SAMIA: It's - it's that this cockroach . . .  
 DOCTOR: Should not come to any harm.  
 SAMIA: Yes. Yes.  
 ADIL: Do you know why?  
 SAMIA: We know all right.  
 ADIL: No, Samia, I'm certain you don't really know. I shall explain it to you and the doctor.  
 SAMIA: No, there's no need, Adil, no need at all. We know and appreciate the position. God willing, everything will return to normal with a little wisdom and patience.  
 ADIL: Yes, a little patience. All that's wanted is a little patience, because things may go on for a while. In any case, it's both interesting and exciting. I don't get bored watching, and so long as this cockroach goes on putting up such a struggle to get out of its impasse, it is not right that we should destroy it.  
 SAMIA: Who said we were going to destroy it? On the contrary, Adil, I'll look after it with every care. I'll sacrifice myself for it.

ADIL: Sacrifice yourself for it? Please, Samia - there's no need to make fun.  
 SAMIA: Absolutely not, Adil. What can I do to convince you that I'm definitely not making fun?  
 ADIL: When all's said and done, the struggle this cockroach is putting up stirs within me a feeling of respect.  
 SAMIA: And who said we had less respect for it than you? We are at one with you, Adil - absolutely at one. Maybe we have even more respect and appreciation for it than you, isn't that so, Doctor?  
 DOCTOR: Of course. Of course.  
 ADIL: More than me? No, I don't think so.  
 SAMIA: And why not?  
 ADIL: Because I've been watching it since early morning, following its every movement. It amazes me the amount of strength that's stored up in it - quite remarkable strength.  
 SAMIA: I'm in agreement with you about that, Adil, and I really do find that it has an extraordinarily strong personality.  
 ADIL: Strong personality?  
 SAMIA: Don't you think so?  
 ADIL: I think it's an exaggeration to say it's got a personality.  
 SAMIA: Honestly, Adil, it's got a strong personality - you must believe that.  
 ADIL: Listen, Samia - don't get characteristics mixed up. The fact that a cockroach has such strength and determination is both acceptable and reasonable, but to say it's got a personality is going too far.  
 SAMIA: I insist it has got a personality. Maybe even its personality is stronger than mine - wouldn't you agree with me there, Doctor?  
 DOCTOR: Very likely.  
 ADIL: What's very likely, Doctor? That this cockroach's personality is stronger than Samia's?  
 DOCTOR: Don't, Mr. Adil, overestimate the personality of your lady wife - with all due deference to her.  
 ADIL: I'm not overestimating but - but to compare my wife with a cockroach!  
 SAMIA: But I'm in agreement, Adil.  
 ADIL: It's not a question of whether you're in agreement or not in agreement - we're talking about the comparison itself.  
 SAMIA: And why should we reject the comparison, seeing that the cockroach commands respect? It does me honour.



ADIL: Are we back again at making fun?  
 SAMIA: Not at all, I swear to you, Adil. I'm absolutely serious - just ask the doctor.  
 ADIL: Listen, Samia, when words lose their normal dimensions, then everything loses its seriousness. I've begun to feel that you're in league with the doctor to ridicule my ideas.  
 DOCTOR: God forbid, Mr. Adil!  
 SAMIA: No, Adil, please don't make such an accusation against the doctor. He is the last person to wish to harm your self-respect. He hasn't interrupted his other work and devoted all his time to us in order to make fun of you and your ideas.  
 DOCTOR: On the contrary, the . . . the fact of the matter is that I . . .  
 SAMIA: Don't say anything, Doctor - it's obvious what your feelings are.  
 ADIL: I'm sorry - I no doubt misunderstood.  
 SAMIA: Be sure, Adil, that we are of the same opinion as you. There is now no disagreement between us. The cockroach is as much an object of affection to us as to you.  
 ADIL: Affection?  
 SAMIA: Yes, and in deference to it and to you I have decided not to have a bath today in order to prove to you I won't attempt to harm it.  
 ADIL: Thank you.  
 SAMIA: Doesn't that please you?  
 ADIL: Of course it pleases me.  
 SAMIA: Everything that pleases you, Adil, everything that makes you happy, I shall at once put into effect for you.  
 ADIL: What's all this tenderness about?  
 SAMIA: I regret all my hasty actions.  
 ADIL: What hasty actions?  
 SAMIA: I haven't always been nice to you.  
 ADIL: That is your right as a woman and a wife, but it is my duty as a man and a husband to endure.  
 SAMIA: No, from now on you shall not endure, I shall not make you endure.  
 ADIL: What's happened now? What's come over the universe?  
 DOCTOR: Your wife is one of the best of wives, Mr. Adil, and is blindly obedient to you.  
 ADIL: Since when?  
 SAMIA: Since today.  
 ADIL: And why today?

SAMIA: Because it . . . because I . . .  
 DOCTOR: Because she naturally doesn't want to see you being ill.  
 ADIL: But I'm not ill.  
 DOCTOR: Of course. Of course you're not ill at all.  
 SAMIA: What the doctor means is you're . . .  
 DOCTOR: Certainly. What I mean is that it's clear you're not ill. That was established by examining you, be sure of that. However, the whole object is to remove the *idea* of illness, not illness itself. Just the fact of seeing a doctor in the house, a doctor who has come because of you, has made your wife feel towards you a certain . . .  
 SAMIA: Yes. Yes. As soon as I saw you would need sick leave . . .  
 ADIL: I don't need sick leave. It's the doctor who made me take it at the time he made out his report. As for me, I'm in no need of any leave.  
 DOCTOR: That's quite so.  
 SAMIA: In any case, Adil, I was unfair to you.  
 ADIL: Sometimes.  
 SAMIA: I admit it.  
 ADIL: Then you won't go to the bathroom before me?  
 SAMIA: No, never - I've turned over a new leaf, I promise.  
 ADIL: You won't tell me to get breakfast?  
 SAMIA: No, I promise. I promise.  
 ADIL: You won't impose your will and orders on me?  
 SAMIA: No, I promise. I promise.  
 ADIL: And what's the secret of this sudden transformation?  
 SAMIA: I didn't realize that this behaviour of mine towards you would have such results.  
 ADIL: What results?  
 DOCTOR: She means . . . she means your being angry.  
 ADIL: But I haven't been angry. I used sometimes to feel annoyance at your behaviour. I was only too often annoyed with you, but I've never been angry with you.  
 DOCTOR: You used to repress it.  
 ADIL: Repress it?  
 DOCTOR: Repress it deep within yourself. It's this repression that leads to . . . that leads to . . .  
 ADIL: Leads to what?  
 DOCTOR: Leads to . . . to temperamental upsets.  
 ADIL: Certainly I feel upset, but only for a while.  
 SAMIA: But maybe you keep some feeling lurking deep inside you.  
 ADIL: Because of you? No, not at all.

SAMIA: I almost believed this morning you hated me.

ADIL: Hated you?

SAMIA: Yes, because of the insecticide.

ADIL: Do you call that hate? A mere feeling of slight annoyance at your wish to destroy this cockroach.

SAMIA: I didn't recognize its importance.

ADIL: And do you now honestly recognize its importance?

SAMIA: Of course.

ADIL: I doubt it.

SAMIA: And why do you doubt it?

ADIL: Because you don't watch it with sufficient attention. Look! For example, it has now begun to stand for long periods on the bottom of the bath. What's the meaning of that?

SAMIA (*looking with attention*): It means that . . .

ADIL: That it's beginning to take rests.

SAMIA: Yes.

ADIL: After that continuous effort it must be in need of rest periods during which it lies prostrate, as you see, quietly moving its whiskers before carrying on anew with its climbing.

DOCTOR (*looking with attention*): It's actually begun moving slowly so as to start climbing again.

SAMIA: That's right - it's started to climb.

ADIL: Note carefully the spot at which it begins to slip.

SAMIA: Yes, yes - the same spot. There it goes - it's slipped!

DOCTOR: And fallen once more to its place at the bottom.

ADIL: Look, it's getting up from its fall and is beginning to climb again.

SAMIA: And it will slip down again. There it is - it's slipped down! The poor thing! It's been doing exactly the same thing since early morning.

ADIL: And maybe since last night, because when we got up we found it already in the bath. It must therefore have fallen into it from the ceiling during the night.

SAMIA: I have a question, Adil? May I?

ADIL: Of course, Samia - ask it.

SAMIA: Have you not thought of rescuing it from its predicament?

ADIL: Rescuing it?

SAMIA: Yes, why don't you rescue it?

ADIL: It's rescuing itself.

SAMIA: How can it rescue itself? It will never be able to. All the time its attempts are in vain because the bath is empty and

slippery; there's nothing for it to climb up but the slippery sides on which it loses its foothold.

ADIL: That's up to it.

SAMIA: At least help it. Give it a little help, Adil. For example, let the end of the towel hang over inside the bath, or bring a piece of string and dangle it over the side - or anything that'll help it to get out.

ADIL: And why should we do that?

SAMIA: To get it out, to get it out alive. Don't you want it to be saved?

ADIL: Who said I wanted it to be saved?

SAMIA: How odd! You don't want it to be saved? Then you want its death?

ADIL: I don't want its death either.

SAMIA: Then what do you want for it?

ADIL: I don't want anything for it. It is no concern of mine.

SAMIA: Of course not. Of course not. It's absolutely no concern of yours. You have no connection with it, no connection at all. You are something and it is something else. We know that only too well, isn't that so, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Without doubt.

SAMIA: Be sure, Adil, that we're *completely* convinced that you have no connection with this cockroach. We wish you to know this well and to believe it.

ADIL: And don't I know this?

SAMIA: The important thing is that you should believe it deep inside you.

ADIL: Believe what?

SAMIA: Believe that there is no relationship and not the slightest similarity between you and it.

ADIL: Similarity between me and it? Whatever next, Samia? Have things come to this pass? You talk of a similarity between me and the cockroach?

SAMIA: On the contrary, it makes me happy to know there's no similarity.

ADIL: Then such a similarity does exist in your view?

SAMIA: Not in mine, Adil.

ADIL: Then in whose?

SAMIA: In your own view?

ADIL: Mine! In my view I resemble the cockroach?

SAMIA: Then you no longer think this is so?

ADIL: Think what? That I resemble the cockroach? In what way



do I resemble it? Please let me know. You've really gone too far; this is too much, Samia, much too much. Me resemble a cockroach? Me? In what way? From what point of view? Whiskers? If it's from the point of view of whiskers, I am clean-shaven, as you can see. From the point of view of features? Of lineaments of face? Speak! Speak! Speak!

SAMIA: Please, Doctor, you speak!

DOCTOR (to Samia): Be so good as to allow us a moment in private.

SAMIA: I'll go and prepare you a cup of coffee, Doctor. (She goes out, leaving the doctor and Adil on their own.)

DOCTOR: Listen, Mr. Adil - you should, first of all, know that your wife is wholly loyal to you and does not at all intend to hurt your feelings.

ADIL: After what I've heard?

DOCTOR: Believe me, she respects you, appreciates you, and has a very high regard for you, despite your belief that your personality is weaker than hers.

ADIL: My personality weaker than hers! Who said so?

DOCTOR: No one at all - a mere supposition, a mere possibility that this was your inner belief.

ADIL: Such a supposition or possibility never occurred to me.

DOCTOR: Maybe, for example, her demands, or what might have been understood as orders, were . . .

ADIL: Certainly she is a person of many demands and orders, even arbitrary actions and a desire to be the boss.

DOCTOR: You admit this point?

ADIL: For sure.

DOCTOR: Then you find that she has a desire to be the boss?

ADIL: Of course, like most wives, and especially those who, like her, have graduated with their husbands from the same college and are employed in the same line of work.

DOCTOR: Equality, then, between the two of you is total in everything?

ADIL: In everything.

DOCTOR: And yet she wants to have the advantage, to be the boss, to dominate.

ADIL: That is exactly my wife's attitude.

DOCTOR: And you let her be the boss and dominate.

ADIL: Yes, and do you know why?

DOCTOR: Because she . . .

ADIL: No, please wait! Don't be too hasty and conclude from

that that she has a stronger personality than me - those are merely her pretensions.

DOCTOR: Her pretensions?

ADIL: Tell me frankly, Doctor, was it not she who said something of that sort to you?

DOCTOR: I believe . . .

ADIL: Yes, I know this of her: deep within her she believes I have a weaker personality than her.

DOCTOR: And is that not true?

ADIL: Of course it's not at all true. She's free to believe whatever she likes about herself. If her conceit portrays things to her in that light, then let her imagine as she will.

DOCTOR: But this does not obviate the fact that you obey her and carry out all her orders.

ADIL: It's a desire on my part to please her, because she's a woman, a weak woman, taken up with her youth, her advancement, her talent. I don't like to shake her belief in her own strength and superiority. I would regard that as meanness, meanness on my part as a strong man. I hold that real manliness demands that she be made to feel her strength and her importance and to raise her morale.

DOCTOR: Raise her morale? Extraordinary! The problem's reversed.

ADIL: What problem?

DOCTOR: Another question, Mr. Adil: the problem of the cockroach?

ADIL: What about the cockroach?

DOCTOR: It's your interest in it?

ADIL: And what's the secret of your interest in my interest?

DOCTOR: None at all, it's just . . .

ADIL: Listen here, Doctor - the whole thing's becoming clear to me. I've now understood. I've understood its beauty and its whiskers and its personality and the similarity. What you were getting at, therefore, was that I . . .

DOCTOR: Frankly, Mr. Adil, sir, yes.

ADIL: Yes?

DOCTOR: Our whole object was merely to assist and to . . .

ADIL: Participate - to assist and participate with my wife in such talk.

DOCTOR: No, Mr. Adil, this is a well-known theory.

ADIL: Theory? What theory?

DOCTOR: To tell you the truth I've not specialized in psychiatry, I've only studied it purely as a hobby, and so . . .

ADIL: Quite understood. And so you came to believe that I belonged to the cockroach species.

DOCTOR: No, it's not quite like that. In any case I've now changed my opinion.

ADIL: Thank God! You now see that I'm a human being!

DOCTOR: You must excuse me, Mr. Adil, but all the surrounding circumstances drew me in that direction.

ADIL: Please, Doctor, explain to me in detail what got into your mind, according to your psychiatry.

DOCTOR: No, there's no point now. I'm sorry.

ADIL: And my wife Samia knew of this opinion of yours?

DOCTOR: Yes.

ADIL: And she it was who helped you to see me as a cockroach?

DOCTOR: No, Mr. Adil, no. It's not like that. It's not, I assure you, quite like that. I assure you.

ADIL: Listen, Doctor, I want to tell you in all frankness that any similarity between me and the cockroach is mere . . .

DOCTOR: My apologies. My apologies, Mr. Adil. Our intentions were well-meant, I swear they were.

ADIL: Allow me to complete what I had to say: if you believed that I resembled a cockroach, then you were mistaken.

DOCTOR: Of course - and how! I admit I made a wrong analysis, that I'm mistaken, a hundred per cent mistaken.

ADIL: Yes, a grave mistake, because I am unable to attain the magnificent level reached by cockroaches.

DOCTOR: What are you saying? The magnificent level?

ADIL: Yes.

DOCTOR: Are you being serious?

ADIL: Wholly serious - and I'm prepared to repeat what I said.

DOCTOR: Then you admire this cockroach?

ADIL: And I appreciate it.

DOCTOR: And you appreciate it?

ADIL: And I respect it.

DOCTOR: And you respect it?

ADIL: And I understand it well.

DOCTOR (*scrutinizing him closely*): Understood. Understood. And you take after it and imagine yourself . . .

ADIL: In its place?

DOCTOR: Yes, like it.

ADIL: Yes, I imagine that.

DOCTOR: Then you, you . . .

ADIL: I what?

DOCTOR: I don't know any longer. You've bewildered me, Mr. Adil.

ADIL: Please, Doctor, that's quite enough. Once again you're applying your psychiatry to me. It's a lot simpler than all that. I shall explain it to you clearly if you'll allow me.

DOCTOR: Please go ahead.

ADIL: First of all, imagine you're a cockroach.

DOCTOR: Me?

ADIL: Or that the cockroach is you.

DOCTOR: Mr. Adil . . .

ADIL: Please don't look at me like that. I understand exactly the meaning of your glances. You are still doubting. You are really at a loss about me, but I assure you once again that it's altogether different from what you have in mind.

DOCTOR: Then your employment of these words is in the nature of a pleasantry or . . .

ADIL: Take it in any meaning you like. The important thing is for you to leave out, as far as I'm concerned, this psychiatric business and be natural with me.

DOCTOR: Be natural?

ADIL: Yes, are you being natural now?

DOCTOR: By God, I'm . . . to tell the truth . . .

ADIL: You're not sure?

DOCTOR: I no longer know anything.

ADIL: I'll tell you what to do: just let yourself go, forget you're a doctor and let's examine the matter with the utmost simplicity. Are you ready to do this?

DOCTOR: Yes.

ADIL: Great! What was I asking you?

DOCTOR: You asked me about . . .

ADIL: Yes, I remember. I asked you to imagine that you . . .

DOCTOR: That I was a cockroach.

ADIL: Or that the cockroach was you.

DOCTOR: Indeed. Indeed.

ADIL: And now to the second step.

DOCTOR: But wait, in my situation I can't . . .

ADIL: Can't what?

DOCTOR: I can't be a cockroach.

ADIL: Why not?

DOCTOR: Because I've never been married.



ADIL: What's that got to do with it?

DOCTOR: It seems that I . . . that I expressed myself badly.

ADIL: No, you merely misunderstood me. I did not ask you to be a family cockroach, in the psychological sense. No, I meant the actual cockroach in front of you there in the bath.

DOCTOR (*pointing at the cockroach in the bath*): That?

ADIL: Yes, that hero.

DOCTOR: Hero?

ADIL: Indeed a hero. Imagine yourself in a deep well with walls of smooth marble and that you found it impossible to get out despite having made exhausting efforts to do so, what would you do?

DOCTOR: I'd give up of course.

ADIL: But it hasn't given up.

DOCTOR: By no means - I see it repeating its attempts dozens of times.

ADIL: Even hundreds. Since early morning I've been occupied in counting up the number of times.

DOCTOR: Is that what you were engaged in since morning?

ADIL: Yes, I wanted to know when its struggle would come to an end.

DOCTOR (*looking into the bath with real interest*): As of now it looks as if it won't give up yet.

ADIL: Indeed. We're tired from watching but it's not tired from trying.

DOCTOR (*continuing to watch it*): What hope has it of escaping?

ADIL: No hope of course.

DOCTOR: Unless you were to intervene and save it.

ADIL: And I shall not intervene.

DOCTOR: Why not, seeing that you admire it?

ADIL: I must leave it to its fate.

DOCTOR: Were it able to scream, and it screamed to you for help, would you not take pity on it?

ADIL: Perhaps, but it's mute and doesn't scream.

DOCTOR: Who are you to say that?

ADIL: What are you saying?

DOCTOR: I am saying that who are we to say it is not screaming now and asking for help - just that the oscillations of its voice are not picked up by the human ear.

ADIL: Very possibly.

DOCTOR: Imagine that it is now screaming and beseeching, and you don't hear and don't understand its language.

ADIL: It also doesn't hear me and see me.

DOCTOR: Yes, every contact between the two of you is severed.

ADIL: Not completely severed, as is borne out by the fact that I am interested in it.

DOCTOR: You are interested in its struggle for life.

ADIL: This, then, is its voice, its pleading, its language which I can hear and understand.

DOCTOR: Certainly, it explains our being so interested in its struggle.

ADIL: Is that not what has kept me in front of the bath since early morning?

DOCTOR (*looking into the bath*): It is in reality an entertaining spectacle.

ADIL (*also looking*): Isn't it.

DOCTOR: Truly, though, I'm surprised at your refraining to help it a little, even by way of remuneration for the spectacle.

ADIL: It really deserves it.

DOCTOR: We're in this together - let's get it out of its plight!

ADIL: Get it out alive?

DOCTOR: Of course.

ADIL: And will Samia accept that?

DOCTOR: She's got a kind heart.

ADIL: I personally prefer not to introduce sentiment into a situation like this, otherwise our position is going to appear truly ridiculous.

*Samia appears in the doorway carrying the coffee.*

DOCTOR: Quite the contrary, the position now is no longer ridiculous at all. It's become understood and acceptable, and I myself have begun to find the subject worth following.

SAMIA (*offering him the coffee*): Coffee, Doctor.

DOCTOR (*without raising his eyes from the bath*): Thanks, I'll have it in a moment.

SAMIA: It seems that the cockroach is also occupying you, Doctor?

DOCTOR (*continuing his viewing*): Certainly it's begun to interest me.

SAMIA: No doubt the disease is catching!

ADIL (*turning to her*): What disease?

SAMIA: The doctor understands what I mean.

DOCTOR (*rousing himself*): Come along, let's drink the coffee first.

*They all go into the bedroom. The doctor sits down in a chair and Samia puts the tray of coffee on a small table beside him.*

SAMIA: Have you finished your examination, Doctor?

ADIL: Whose examination? My examination?

SAMIA: No, Adil, I'm just having a word with the doctor.

DOCTOR: I think it's best now to talk openly, for there's no reason or necessity for hiding anything. Mr. Adil is in perfect health and vigour, and can put on his clothes and go out as of now if he wants.

SAMIA: And the sick leave, Doctor?

DOCTOR: That's another question. However, Madam, your husband is in the right about everything and I completely endorse his behaviour, there being nothing at all untoward about it.

SAMIA: And the cockroach?

DOCTOR: What about the cockroach? I myself hope that I could become like the cockroach.

SAMIA (*winking at the doctor*): Ah, understood. I understand, Doctor.

DOCTOR: No, honestly, I'm speaking seriously.

SAMIA: Speaking seriously?

ADIL: Of course, Samia, it's serious. The doctor has explained everything to me, has been absolutely open with me. In any case, may God be indulgent towards you!

SAMIA: Is that right, Doctor?

DOCTOR: The fact is that we had understood the situation wrongly and took up an erroneous attitude.

SAMIA: Meaning that Adil . . .

DOCTOR: Absolutely, a hundred per cent.

SAMIA: Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God. I was extremely worried about you, Adil.

ADIL: You thought there was some sort of kinship between me and the cockroach!

SAMIA: You shouldn't blame me, Adil; your great love for it . . .

DOCTOR: On the contrary, it appears it wasn't love or anything of the sort, because if he'd loved it he'd have had pity on it and saved it. Our whole hope now lies in your compassion.

SAMIA: My compassion?

DOCTOR: Yes - and I personally would ask you, I would intercede with you . . .

SAMIA: Intercede for whom, Doctor?

DOCTOR: For the cockroach.

SAMIA (*shouting*): Doctor! Doctor! Adil, what's happened to the doctor?

DOCTOR: Don't be upset. Don't be upset. I'm fine and well.

SAMIA: Fine and well - like my husband!

ADIL: Yes, like me of course.

SAMIA: What a disaster - you and the doctor! There's only Umm Attiya and I left. It'll be our turn next. No, it can't be - I'm going out at once. Umm Attiya! Umm Attiya!

ADIL: What's happened, Samia? Have you gone mad?

SAMIA: Is it I who've gone mad?

DOCTOR: Calm down, Madam, and allow us to explain things to you.

COOK (*appearing*): You called, Ma'am?

SAMIA: Yes, I'm going out. Prepare my bath.

COOK: Certainly, Ma'am.

*She quickly enters the bathroom and turns on the bath tap.*

ADIL (*not conscious of what is happening in the bathroom, he walks towards his wife*): Calm down, Samia. Calm down a little and allow us to explain things to you.

DOCTOR: Your nerves are upset, Madam, without proper reason - if you'd only allow us to say a word.

SAMIA: No, there's no point, Doctor.

ADIL: Don't you want to come to an understanding?

SAMIA: It's enough the understanding between you and the doctor - you're both in league against me.

DOCTOR: Not against you, Madam. Would it be reasonable? It's only that I've become convinced by Mr. Adil's point of view; I've understood the true meaning of his purpose and behaviour.

SAMIA: And so you've become like him.

ADIL: Like me? You mean like a cockroach.

DOCTOR: That's an honour for me.

SAMIA: You see, it really is catching!

*The cook in the bathroom, having turned on the tap and filled the bath, stretches out her hand and removes the cockroach, dead, with the tip of her fingers, throwing it into a corner of the bathroom.*

COOK: I've run the bath, Ma'am!

ADIL (*realizing what has happened*): She's filled the bath! (*He*



*hurries into the bathroom and gives a shout after looking into the bath.)* Come along here, Doctor – what we feared has happened.

DOCTOR (*following him*): What's happened?

ADIL: The cockroach is dead.

DOCTOR: Dead?

ADIL: It was no doubt drowned. But where is it? Umm Attiya, where's the cockroach that was here in the bath?

COOK (*pointing to the corner of the bathroom*): I threw it down there, for the time being. (*She goes out.*)

ADIL: What a pity!

DOCTOR: Yes, it certainly is a pity.

SAMIA: Shall I get you a professional mourner? Shall we bring some music and you can walk in its funeral procession?

ADIL: That's quite enough sarcasm, thank you!

DOCTOR: Let the matter rest, Mr. Adil. What's happened has happened. In any case you wanted to leave it to its fate, and this is its fate.

ADIL: Yes, it had to end – somehow. Let us cast a last look at its corpse.

DOCTOR: Where's its corpse?

SAMIA: Its corpse? Even you, Doctor!

*Adil and the doctor look round for the cockroach in the corner of the bathroom.*

ADIL: Look. Look, Doctor, at these ants. Where have they come from?

DOCTOR (*looks*): Yes, a horde of ants is carrying it off.

SAMIA: Ants?

ADIL: Yes, ants carrying off the corpse of the cockroach. Come, Samia, look! It's a really extraordinary sight – a crowd of ants carrying off the cockroach and taking it up the wall. Look, Doctor, they're taking it towards one of those cracks.

DOCTOR (*continuing to look*): It's obviously their house, or their village, or their warehouse in which they'll store this booty.

ADIL: Take note of that ant in the front. Do you see it?

DOCTOR: Yes, it's dragging the cockroach by its whiskers.

ADIL: As though it were a ship's tow rope.

DOCTOR: And this group of ants in the rear, they're pushing it from the back. Do you see?

ADIL: The work's distributed amongst them with extraordinary discipline.

DOCTOR: And the most extraordinary thing is that they're going up at speed, despite their heavy load.

ADIL: There's only a short distance left between them and the crack or warehouse. But look, Doctor, it seems as if the opening is too small for the size of the cockroach. How can it be got in?

DOCTOR: Don't be afraid, it'll get in – nothing is too difficult for the genius of ants.

SAMIA (*looking at them from the door*): Having finished with the heroism of cockroaches we've now started on the genius of ants!

ADIL (*continuing to watch*): I doubt if it's possible to get the cockroach into that small crack.

DOCTOR (*also watching*): We'll soon see.

*The telephone rings.*

SAMIA (*hurrying to the phone*): Telephone, Adil! Perhaps it's for you.

ADIL (*turns and joins her*): For me?

SAMIA (*taking up the receiver*): Hullo. Who did you say? The doctor? Yes, he's here. Just a moment. (*She calls out.*) It's for you, Doctor.

DOCTOR (*hurrying over and taking up the receiver*): Hullo. The company. Yes, I'm the doctor. How do you do? Where's this case? Street . . . number . . . Wait while I write it down. (*Takes out a small notebook and writes.*) What did you say the number was? Thank you. The case I'm on at present? Oh, I've finished with that now. Quite satisfactory. No, not at all serious. Merely indisposed. I'll tell him. Thanks. (*He puts down the receiver.*)

ADIL: They're asking about me at the company?

DOCTOR: Naturally.

SAMIA: They thought it was a serious case.

DOCTOR (*to Adil*): They express their hopes for your recovery.

ADIL: Recovery?

SAMIA: And I too join my voice to theirs.

ADIL: Yes? Yes?

*In the meantime the cook has slipped into the bathroom carrying a bucket of water and a rag and has begun cleaning it and removing the*

*ants from off the wall. The others, occupied in their conversation, have not noticed.*

DOCTOR (*looking at his watch*): I must leave you – there's another case waiting for me.

SAMIA: Another case?

DOCTOR: In a far-away street. I mustn't be late. Goodbye.

ADIL: Wait, Doctor. Are you going off just like that without taking a look at the ants?

SAMIA: Do you want to hold the doctor up for the ants as well?

DOCTOR: It would in fact interest me, let's go and have a look.

ADIL: Off we go, perhaps the ants will have succeeded in getting the cockroach into that crack.

SAMIA (*looking at them in wonder*): By God, it's amazing!

*As Adil and the doctor reach the bathroom the cook leaves it with her bucket.*

COOK (*to Samia*): I've cleaned the bathroom, Ma'am.

*Samia is busy taking her clothes out of the wardrobe.*

ADIL (*in the bathroom*): What a disaster it would be if Umm Aitiya's done it.

COOK (*without understanding*): Done it?

ADIL (*shouting as he stands in front of the wall*): What a pity! What a pity!

DOCTOR (*standing behind him and looking at the wall*): She's done it!

ADIL: She's done it. Look – she's removed the ants, the cockroach and the lot. She's cleared the wall of everything.

DOCTOR (*coming out of the bathroom*): Bad luck!

ADIL (*to the cook as he comes out*): Why, Umm Aitiya? Why?

COOK: What have I done?

ADIL: Nothing, nothing at all – just carry on with your work, God damn you!

*The cook goes out in bewilderment. The doctor takes up his bag.*

DOCTOR: I trust you'll spend your day resting and return to work tomorrow feeling a lot better, God willing.

ADIL: And what's keeping me till tomorrow? I'll get dressed now and go to work immediately.

DOCTOR: No, please, you're supposed to be on leave today.

ADIL: And what can I do now with this leave? Can't you cancel it?

DOCTOR: How can I cancel it? The company knows I'm here and that I've come to see you. What shall I say to them?

Shall I say that he's . . .

SAMIA: That he's been sitting and watching a cockroach!

DOCTOR: Don't complicate things, Mr. Adil – a day's sick leave and that's that and the problem's solved.

SAMIA (*taking up her clothes*): I'm going into the bathroom. If you'll excuse me. I think it's no longer forbidden to go into the bathroom!

ADIL: Lucky you!

SAMIA: Advise him, Doctor, to spend his day off doing something useful.

ADIL: And what, in your view, is doing something useful?

DOCTOR: Anyway, Mr. Adil knows how to spend his time usefully and enjoyably.

SAMIA: I can bet he'll be spending the day sitting down writing memoirs about the fate of the cockroach!

DOCTOR: And where's the cockroach now? No sign is left of it, not even one of its whiskers.

ADIL: The important thing was its struggle for life.

DOCTOR: Yes, and that is what will remain fixed in my memory. Goodbye, everyone.

SAMIA: We're most grateful, Doctor. We're sorry for having kept you with us all this time without proper reason.

DOCTOR: Not at all. Not at all.

SAMIA: I hope that the case to which you are going is a little more serious!

DOCTOR: You may be sure that I didn't waste my time uselessly with yourselves. Goodbye. (*He leaves hurriedly.*)

SAMIA (*as she enters the bathroom*): Listen, Adil, you've got the day off today. You should know that I want you to spend this day usefully. D'you hear? There are my clothes and dresses all crumpled up in the wardrobe – get down to sorting them out and hang them up at your leisure – one by one so that when I come back from work I'll find everything nicely sorted out and organized. Understood?

*Adil remains silent, his head lowered.*

SAMIA: D'you hear what I say?



ADIL: I do.

SAMIA: And let's not find a single dress creased or crumpled.  
Understood?

ADIL (*shouting*): Understooooood!

SAMIA: I'm warning you. (*She goes into the bathroom and locks herself in.*)

ADIL (*shouting*): Umm Attiya, bring the bucket and rag and wipe me out of existence!

CURTAIN

---

## The Song of Death

### Characters

ASAKIR

MABROUKA

ALWAN, Asakir's son

SUMEIDA, Mabrouka's son